SEA WITHOUT SHORE

A Manual of the Sufi Path

NUH HA MIM KELLER

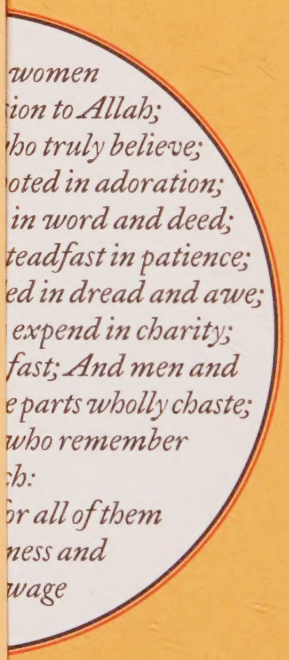
Sea Without Shore is a practical manual for those travelling the path of Sufism or Islamic mysticism, which strives, in Junayd's words, "to separate the Beginninglessly Eternal from that which originates in time," in a word, to be *with* the Divine without any relation.

The book opens with narratives of Sufis met by the author in Syria, Jordan, and Turkey whose lives exemplified the knowledge and practice of the Sufi path.

The second part is a complete handbook of the method and rule of the Shadhili order of Sufism, transmitted to the author by his spiritual mentor, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri—from devotions, dhikr or 'invocation,' and metaphysical doctrine, to how a Sufi lives, marries, and earns a living in the modern world.

A third part treats wider theological questions such as other faiths and mysticisms, universalism and the finality of Islam, the promise of God to Jews and Christians, evolution and religion, and divine Wisdom and Justice in the face of human suffering.

The book provides an indelible portrait of a vibrant mystical tradition spanning seven and a half centuries of endeavor to know the Divine without any other.



SEA WITHOUT SHORE

He is the First and Last
the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden
And He well knows every single thing
KORAN 57:3

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Nuh Ha Mim Keller

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In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate

PREFACE

This work is an approach to the Creator of man, who describes Himself as "closer to him than the very veins of the jugular" (Koran 50:16).

The book has three parts. The first describes men I met and knew in the path. All were fonts of guidance whom God had blessed with His greatest gift: experiencing the incomparable Oneness of the Divine. I begin with them lest such men be thought to no longer exist, but also because they themselves had been taught by men who travelled the way before them, and regarded any other Sufi path as the pride that precedes a fall. The second part sets forth the rule of the Shadhili Order, the way of my sheikh and others mentioned in this volume, because it is a Sufi method that is tried and true. As a contemporary manual, some things are specific to our times, but most will never change as long as there is any path. A third part contains answers to theological questions of our day that travellers may need. The Arabic terms are glossed where they first appear in the present work or defined in a glossary in the back. A few proper Arabic names have been spelled as they are by their owners or as colloquially pronounced. The text is uncluttered with reference notation for most brief maxims and poetry of the Sufis, whose instruction remains even today mainly spoken. Documentation is rather confined to texts cited as evidence, whether Koran, hadith, or written authorities, and consists of a parenthesized shortened title of the work, followed by a bracketed number locating it in the Works Cited, then the quotation's volume and page number, or if a hadith, its number and authenticity rating using one of the abbreviations given on the following page.

May our Almighty Master grant us the supreme grace of His Divine Presence in this world and the next: "Nor is that difficult for Allah" (Koran 35:17).

ABBREVIATIONS

D ..... a weak (da'if) hadith
d. ..... died
ed. ..... edited by
fig. ..... figuratively
H ..... a well-authenticated (hasan) hadith in itself
HG ..... a well-authenticated (hasan) hadith in view of corroboratory versions
lit. ..... literally
n.d. ..... no publication date given
n.p. ..... no publication place given
pl. ..... plural
S ..... a rigorously authenticated (sahih) hadith in itself
SG ..... a rigorously authenticated (sahih) hadith in view of corroboratory versions
sing. ..... singular
tr. ..... translated by
vols. .... volumes

PART ONE

Men of the Path

CHAPTER ONE

THE SHEIKH

HEIKH 'Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri left this world in the summer of 2004 in Damascus, after a lifetime of serving Islam and Muslims and the spiritual path. Thousands came to his funeral the next day at the mosque of Sheikh Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi in the Salihiyya quarter. Among the people who prayed over him and buried him were those who knew him as a father, friend, religious scholar, teacher, mystical poet and vocalist, and Sufi sheikh. I knew him as the latter.

I stood in the shade of the mosque as people filed out, waiting for wife and friends. He had been our sheikh, and still was; and now he was gone. It was difficult to join between the impressions in my heart. The personal sense of loss and sorrow was counterbalanced by a strange sense of his soul's ascent to total perspicacity and light—and somewhat paradoxically, of his continued help.

Twenty-two years before we had come out of this mosque together after visiting the shrine of Sheikh Muhyiddin. I had watched for a moment as he stopped to buy some apples from a cart in front of the mosque. He took the plastic bag from the seller and filled it with the worst apples he could find—nicked, bruised, and worm-holed—which he chose as carefully as most people choose good ones, then paid for and with a smile shook hands with the man before we went up the hill to the sheikh's home. Small and lithe, he had a light complexion, penetrating

eyes, aquiline features with expressive lips, and a trimmed mustache and full beard. He dressed elegantly, wearing a few turns of white and gold cloth around a red fez on his head, a knee-length suitcoat and with its vest over a shirt without a tie, and trousers tapering to the ankles. As we climbed higher and higher, I wanted to carry the bag, but he wouldn't let me, saying that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had said, "He who needs a thing should carry it." When I reflected on his strange "shopping," I realized that it had been to save the apple man from having to throw any out. The incident summed up the sheikh's personality and life, which was based on *futuwwa* or putting others ahead of oneself.

I and many of us who knew him loved him as a *wali* or friend of Allah, and surely his long decades of selfless service to others had much to do with it. Among them were his family: his wife bore him five sons and five daughters, and he was preceded to the afterlife by her and one son. With the apples and everything else he did, he was always teaching students the inner sunnas of the character and states of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), to whom he referred everything, saying, "I am just a parrot."

When I first took the tariqa from him, thoughts would come to me about the lucre of the evangelists and gurus back in the West, and I would wonder, "What if he asks for money?" For a space, every time I visited him he would ask me how much my fare had been from Jordan, how much the hotel was, whether I had spent anything else, and then give me the whole sum. The day came when I saw what he was getting at, the thoughts went away, and he never mentioned money again.

Too, I once came to Damascus to complain about one of the brethren in Jordan, and after checking into a hotel, went to the tiny office and bookshop of Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil al-Durubi off the courtyard of the Darwishiyya Mosque. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman would drop in there after the noon prayer each day to visit with his friends, where I found him and gave my Salams. Before I could say anything, he said, "How is your *ego* getting along with So-and-so?" mentioning the person I was thinking

about by name. I was stymied for a moment, then said, "Allah be praised." The sheikh replied, "Allah be praised," then talked about the importance of being with true and honest people, and avoiding those who spoke badly of others.

Despite such incidents, the sheikh would say, "The person of the sheikh is a veil," and he never drew attention to spiritual powers or himself, but always to Allah and to the sunna of His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace). He stressed learning the traditional sciences, and would not permit a disciple's ignorance of fiqh (religious practice) or *'aqida* (tenets of faith).

He had never been to school himself, because as an orphan brought at three years of age from Homs to Damascus by his older brother, he had had to earn his keep by running errands, and had taught himself how to read and write by looking at the signs above the shops whose owners' names he knew. When he later got a job as a weaver, he used to sing his own rustic religious compositions to popular tunes, keeping time with the loom he worked. A fellow worker heard him, and told him that he should study classical Arabic. "What is classical Arabic?" he asked, and the man took him to Sheikh Husni al-Baghghal, who educated him in Shafi'i fiqh and Arabic grammar. He studied these and other traditional subjects with sheikhs of the time such as Muhammad Barakat, 'Ali al-Daqr, Isma'il al-Tibi, and Lutfi al-Fayyumi al-Hanafi.

He told us once that when Sheikh Husni al-Baghghal caught tuberculosis, before the era of antibiotics, he was put in quarantine, and when his student 'Abd al-Rahman defied it by visiting him, the sheikh told him he was risking his life. In reply, seeing that the sheikh had a candy in his mouth, the student asked if he could see it for a moment. The sheikh gave it to him, and the young man popped it into his own mouth, telling him that according to Islamic tenets of faith ('ilm al-tawhid), "things have no effect in themselves, but only through Allah's will." The illness proved terminal to the sheikh, though nothing befell the student.

His long association with such sheikhs bequeathed him a lifelong respect for Islamic knowledge and a habit of making sure

before answering any question about religion. When I once asked him what *dhikr*s or invocations one should recite after the prescribed prayer, though he had prayed all his life and was over seventy at the time, instead of answering he reached to his bookshelf, found Imam Nawawi's *Kitab al-adhkar*, and read several rigorously authenticated (sahih) hadiths from it. Throughout the 1980s, whenever I would ask him about a hadith or verse of the Koran, he would always open up a reference work and in his patient way find something about it. Though he knew the answers, I had to be taught to use references, so he taught me. This became apparent in later years, when he came to answer more freely from his own learning.

When I first sat with him, I was eager to explain to him the "esoteric doctrines" I had gleaned from Sufi paperbacks in English. One I had was called *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, and talked about making inner contact with one's own "Sheikh of the Unseen," who could be relied on to guide one directly from the heart. "The Sheikh of the Unseen," he said, "is *Iblis* (Satan)." After having heard enough, he finally brought me up with the words "You have to gain real knowledge ('ilm): there is no need for Orientalist philosophizing." Some years later when I told him while walking into the mosque in Medina about the "transcendent unity of all religions" popularized by writers in our times, he just looked away and said, "*A'udhu bi Llah* (I take refuge in Allah)."

At the same time, he had tremendous patience and care for his *murid*s or disciples. One Ramadan, I was in Damascus studying with Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, staying at the Amin Hotel across the street from the Darwishiyya. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman saw me, and invited me to his house to have *iftar*, the sunset meal with which the fast is broken. At sunset we found ourselves alone in his diwan; the house and the city were silent. He brought the food, set it out, and we talked as we ate. My Arabic was not a pleasure to listen to, and I didn't know anything about manners with one's sheikh, but he put up with me for the whole meal, and even invited me to come again the next night. And so it went: every night I was in Damascus I would have *iftar* with him, and

he would invite me back the next night, as if he had no family to share the traditional meal with. He had a murid staying at a hotel with no one to invite him, so he invited me himself.

I had taken the path at his hands on 29 January 1982, just days before the massacre of the Muslim Brotherhood and others in Hama, Syria's fourth largest city, by government security commandos. A running battle ensued for a few years between security and the Brotherhood in various other places around the country, among them Damascus. Many people disappeared and were never seen again. Some had affiliations with the Brotherhood, some merely knew members, others were just young men with beards who performed their prayers in the mosque and were arrested "just in case." The policy was to arrest the young and leave the old, among them the sheikhs and ulema. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman did not cancel a single lesson, as he considered the tariqa essentially beyond politics, saying of Sufi lessons, "We never speak of three things: this world, women, or politics."

In the first months of that year, I would go to Damascus on the weekend and attend the sheikh's Friday morning lesson at his house from Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiyya* that he began after the dawn prayer. I once asked him why he taught it, and he replied that it was to defend the sheikh against those in our times who claimed that what he had said was heretical or contravened the Koran and sunna. "Otherwise," he said, "our own [tariqa's] books would be enough for us." After the lesson, he would invite me to stay for breakfast with him and a few of the brethren. When I appeared virtually every week for a space of time, he spoke to me in private and told me that some of the brothers were afraid I would draw unwanted attention from the secret police.

Thereafter, and for most of the 1980s, I avoided the sheikh's public lessons and dhikrs entirely. Instead I would travel to Damascus, and before even checking into the hotel, would make my way unobtrusively to the mosque of Sheikh Muhyiddin, then climb up the maze of walkways, steps, and alleys I had memorized to approximately the same height on the side of Mount Qasiyun as the sheikh's house. I then cut across the mountainside on foot

to the west through the streets of a Shiite and other neighborhoods, and finally came to the house of the sheikh.

The atmosphere in the early years was tense, perhaps like that of Warsaw or Prague under Nazi occupation. Religious people were afraid to visit each other, and the sheikh did not have the social engagements that normally filled his life. Seldom did I find the sheikh when I went to visit him in those years except alone and at home. To avoid leading anyone to him, I would only visit him the one time at the first of each trip. I listened closely, generally spent an hour or two with him, and we spoke only about Sufism, which he liked.

I asked him many questions about the path, and would record these on my tape recorder. The recorder was particularly necessary in the earlier years since due to my Arabic and the unfamiliarity of the terms, I had to listen a few times to get what he had said. One of his most memorable lessons in this period was a single aphorism from Abu Sulayman al-Darani, who said, "When souls make up their mind to abandon all sins, they roam freely in the spiritual world and return to their owners with exquisite pieces of wisdom without any scholar having imparted knowledge to them." I worked for years to apply this, and learned from it the tremendous blessing of teaching maxims. In later years, I would simply write the visits down in my notebook of that year. I still have a chest of these old notebooks, and pull them out sometimes and read things I never remember writing; but there they are, the lessons of the sheikh still giving benefit, by Allah's grace. Abu Munir, the sheikh's servant, was not there at first, but came two or three years later, and taped the sheikh's regular lessons for me, which saved me many trips. In this way, several whole books the sheikh taught were recorded, and several hundred hours of Sheikh Muhyiddin's *Futuhat al-Makkiyya*. What I really gained, however, was not the fund of Sufi lore, but a perception of the approach of the sheikh to the religion as a whole, his state, his closeness to Allah, his gnosis, and his ecstasy. With the years, I came to apprehend what he would say on many questions without having to ask. I really wanted to be like him, and didn't care how long or what it took.

When finished with one of these early visits, I would put the cassette or two in my inner pockets, and slip another tape into the recorder containing Arabic lessons for beginners. This would be taken out of my book bag and listened to by Syrian security at the borders as I left the country, who drew their own conclusions, put it back, and waved me through.

I was living at the time in Huwwara, then Sarih, in northern Jordan, and in an effort to financially help the family there of Sheikh al-Kurdi, who had left a roomful of copies of Sufi books and pamphlets he had printed in Damascus and Jordan in his lifetime, I once tried to take a box of them to Damascus to ask Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil if he could sell them. At the Syrian border at Der'a, all that the security men understood was that these were "religious books," so they took me in for questioning. I was put in a small cell, and taken for interrogation at intervals. After some fifty-two hours, the chief summoned me to his office and in a winning manner, told me I was released, could have my books, and that my way was clear to Damascus. He said, "Please excuse us," which I later learned was the standard farewell upon departure of any state prisoner in Syria, even if beaten, tortured, or imprisoned for decades. The chief then had me taken to the café of the border post. The guard in charge of me made some conversation, and asked me what my name was. It took me a while to remember. I did have enough sense, though, not to go on to Damascus and lead them to the sheikh.

The next weekend, dressed as a tourist, I went to Mafraq, and caught the train to Damascus. It had a different checkpoint through Der'a than the shared-fare cars I routinely took, and this time I pretended not to understand any Arabic. When I informed the sheikh what had happened, he told me that in the future I should recite the Throne Verse (Koran 2:255) whenever I crossed a border, and I never had troubles after that except when I forgot.

In these years, the sheikh seemed so old and frail that I kept wondering, "What if he passes away before I finish my spiritual journey?" At every illness—and he had a few—my heart would feel a chill, and I would hear misgivings and suggestions, grounded, as most infernal thoughts are, in some points of fact.

I had arrived in Jordan more than eight years after the death of Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id al-Kurdi, the last great spiritual guide there. Many disciples I met and talked to had only known him for four years, some for only two, before he died. Since the days of Sheikh al-'Alawi of Algeria at the first of the century, the sheikhs of our tariqa had used the *khalwa* or solitary retreat to train disciples. One of the main reasons I had sought out Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman in Damascus was that Sheikh al-Kurdi had not authorized anyone else to put disciples through it.

In the course of my first year with the sheikh, I asked about the khalwa, and he explained that his and Sheikh al-Kurdi's sheikh, Muhammad al-Hashimi, had used the rooms in the Qalbaqjiyya Zawiya near the Nuriyya Mosque in the Old City. At present, he told me—in the wake of a massacre of scores of 'Alawite cadets in Aleppo imputed to the *Ikhwan al-Muslimin* or Muslim Brotherhood, and the government's own massacre of thousands of citizens in Hama—the 'Alawite regime had sent its security forces to clean up the Old City's close-packed homes around the Hamidiyya in central Damascus, a warren of resistance. The police had entered the zawiya and placed red wax seals upon almost every door in the place, under the direst threats for breaking them. The khalwa was effectively closed.

Around the same time, at a moment when Syrian troops were massed on the northern borders of Jordan for its allegedly giving asylum to members of the *Ikhwan*, one of our brothers in Jordan decided to give a *mawlid* celebration of the Prophet's birthday (Allah bless him and give him peace). He phoned the sheikh in Damascus, inviting him down by saying, "The brothers (al-ikhwan) would love to see you." The call was overheard by security in Damascus, and the infelicitous word resulted in repeated interrogations for the sheikh and finally the cancellation of his passport. For the next seven years he could not come to Jordan.

As the khalwa receded into the distance, my thoughts went on and on about the sheikh's condition and age. To add to matters, a paperback came to my hand averring that there was no true Sufi path left on the face of the earth except So-and-so's Naqshbandi

tariqa. I put my fears before Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman one afternoon. I had a copy of Sheikh al-Hashimi's *al-Hall al-sadid*, and pointed out a passage in it, which the sheikh took and read aloud:

> As for when the path is merely "for the blessing of it" and the sheikh lacks some of the conditions of a true guide, or when the disciple is seeking several different aims from it at once, or the disciple's intention is contrary to the spiritual will of the sheikh, or the time required is unduly prolonged, or he is separated from his sheikh by the latter's death or the exigencies of the time and has not yet completed his journey to Allah in the path or attained his goal from it—then it is obligatory for him to go and associate with someone who can complete his journey for him and convey him to what he seeks from the path, as it is not permissible for him to remain bound to the first sheikh his whole life if it is only to die in ignorance of his Lord, claiming that this is the purpose of the path. By no means is this the purpose. The purpose of the path is to reach the goal, and a path that does not reach it is a means without an end. The path was made for travel on it with the intention of reaching one's goal, not for remaining and residing in even if this leads to dying in ignorance of one's Lord. The meaning of a true disciple is one who forthrightly submits himself to a living sheikh who is a guide (murshid) during the days of his journey to Allah Most High so that the sheikh may put him through the stages of the journey until he can say to him, "Here you are, and here is your Lord" (*al-Hall al-sadid* [40], 7).

He looked at me levelly and said, "Sidi, if I didn't think I could finish with you, I wouldn't have begun." He also told me, quoting from al-Ghawth Abu Madyan,

> I am the sheikh of Love:
> Whoever is wholeheartedly following me,
> I guide him in rapture
> An exalted straight path.

Eventually, other rooms were found for the khalwa, and ultimately the sheikh did pass on—decades later. Looking back, I realized that Allah had been teaching me something about *tawakkul* or whole trust in God: that too much desire for control puts one under the Devil's control; and that planning does not benefit the traveller when it concerns the *warid* or 'that which is from God,' but only when it concerns the *wird* or 'that which is from oneself to God,' one's own practice of spiritual works.

Practice was the aim of the sheikh's knowledge. Imam Abul Hasan al-Shadhili (d. 654/1258), whose order the sheikh belonged to, would not let his disciples beg, but had them earn their own livelihood, and Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman emphasized the importance of having a trade to earn one's living by the work of one's hands. He used to say, "I hope to pass on from this world without having taken a single piaster from anyone: I don't even take from my own children."

Born in Homs in 1910 of a noble family descended from the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), he came to Damascus and worked first as a stableboy, then running errands, then as a weaver, then as a foreman, then as a supervisor of textile mills. He had been instrumental in unionizing workers in the twentieth century in Damascus, and served on the committee that led the Syrian Textile Workers' Union in a successful forty-day strike for workmen's compensation. He had represented Syria in the United Arab Workers' Union, and led an active public life. When the textile industry was nationalized under socialism, he was but two years away from retiring and receiving his pension, and he was now asked to head the industry. He replied that "nationalization is theft," and preferred to be fired and forfeit his pension than have anything to do with it. He later found a position as a teacher of tenets of faith at a religious academy, where he taught until he was over eighty years of age and could no longer walk to work.

While still in his twenties, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman took the Shadhili path from Sheikh Muhammad al-Hashimi, the representative in Damascus of Sheikh Ahmad al-'Alawi of Mostaganem, Algeria. He remembered meeting Sheikh al-'Alawi in

1932 on his visit to Damascus after the hajj. Sheikh al-'Alawi had sat in the Shamiyya Mosque after sunset to give a lesson, and the young weaver had looked askance at the sheikh's socks, which were French, not of the plain-spun local manufacture. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman told us: "I thought: 'Look at those socks. This man is supposed to be a sheikh?' Then he began to speak on the aphorism of Sidi Ibn 'Ata Illah

> "Do not leave the invocation of Allah (dhikr) because of your lack of presence with Allah therein, for your heedlessness *of* invocation is worse than your heedlessness *in* invocation. It may well be that He raises you from invocation with heedlessness to invocation with attentiveness, and from invocation with attentiveness to invocation with presence, and from invocation with presence to invocation in which there is absence—from anything besides the Invoked, 'nor is that difficult for Allah' [Koran 14:20].

"His commentary was something else. When he finished and the night prayer came," Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman smiled as he remembered, "I said to myself, 'This sheikh can wear any kind of socks he likes.'"

He had kept the company of Sheikh al-Hashimi for nearly three years before taking him as his spiritual master. He related that the sheikh had simply told him one day that it was time for him to enter the khalwa, and when he objected that he had not yet even taken the tariqa, the sheikh had been surprised, but gave him the tariqa and put him in anyway. It proved to be an axial experience, and when he came out, he composed a *qasida*, a mystic ode, sung at Sufi dhikrs to this day from Algeria to Damascus:

> The curtains of 'between' have been lifted,
> And the lights of Oneness appeared;
> Disclosed without any 'where,'
> So see them, O Sufis!
> I am the mirror of my Beloved,
> In His love, O my spirit, grow well;
> From other than Him, O self, be absent,
> And cast aside all things vile.

Since He has been manifest in these places of vision,
Have I been bowing and prostrate;
Thanking Him and praising,
For He has encompassed me in Identity.
O the wonderfulness of my encounter,
O my subsistence in my annihilation;
O the light of my empyrean,
O my life forever and ever.
The pourer has drawn near us,
And presented us the goblet;
We have sipped and drunk our fill,
From the cups of al-Hashimi.
My friend, seize the chance to live,
How many a dead person that came to them revived;
Never shall anyone be disappointed, never,
Who comes with a true intention.
Clear your heart for the theophany,
Open your eye to true joy;
Other than the Divine, my friend, abandon,
And be annihilated in the Exalted Entity.
Quaff the goblet openly,
See no disgrace in drinking;
Go mad with love, and throw off all shame,
In the most sacred meanings.
Speed with might and main to the stations,
Following the way of the ancients;
Heed not him who would bar your love,
To give ear is but tribulation.
It is the All in All from its inception,
Those who would bar love have no action;
The forbidding of love is naught but
Sent from the Bestower of Gifts.
Then shower blessings, O You of Majesty,
Upon the Door of Connection;
Taha, with Companions and folk,
Long as camelteer may chant to spur his mount.

In subsequent years, until Sheikh al-Hashimi's death in 1961

and afterwards, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman had been the head *munshid*, singer of mystic odes, at the *hadra* or public dhikr—the audition (sama') advocated by Imam Junayd and his circle anciently, and used in the Shadhili tariqa for the last several centuries. He used to say, "A *munshid* is half a *murshid* (spiritual guide)." He related that when he had once set an ode to a melody that no one had ever heard the like of before, Sheikh al-Hashimi smiled and raised a finger, telling him, "Don't think that *you* created it!" Sheikh al-Hashimi also authorized him to give the General Litany (Wird al-'Amm) of the tariqa to others in his native Homs. Although later in the sixties after his sheikh had passed on, the brethren asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman to teach them, and he had been authorized at the time by both Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id al-Hamzawi of Syria and Sheikh 'Ali al-Budlaymi of Algeria, he did not use either authorization to teach. Instead, he waited until Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id al-Kurdi of Jordan—whom he himself had introduced to Sheikh al-Hashimi in the 1930s, and been his fellow disciple—authorized him and made him his successor.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman's teaching in Sufism, like that of Dhul Nun al-Misri, Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, Ibn al-'Arabi, Mawlay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi, and others, was based on *Wahdat al-Wujud*, the Oneness of Being, realized experientially by the *salik* or mystic traveller. "Oneness of Being" meant the being of Allah, and was never confused or identified with the contingent being of created things. "Created things," Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman would say, "never even catch the scent of true Being." Rather, Allah is One, without any partner in His transcendent perfection, without any associate in His entity, attributes, rulings, or actions; while the entire world is merely His *action*, as the Koran says, "This is the *creating* of Allah, so show me what those besides Him have created" (Koran 31:11). For Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, the world was pure act, while Allah was pure Being, and the two were completely distinct, though the world depended solely and entirely upon its Maker, whom it revealed as His action. This was his conception of the Oneness of Being, and "the spiritual way," as he put it, is "that knowledge become vision."

I was curious at the beginning of the path as to how this vision should be, and on a visit I recorded in the sheikh's diwan, I said, "The station of 'beholding' (mushahada)—does it take different forms?"

He said: "Beholding the Divine is of two kinds: that of the eye, and that of the heart. In this world, the beholding of the heart is had by many of the *'arifin* (knowers of Allah, sing. *'arif*), and consists of looking at contingent things, created beings, that they do not exist through themselves, but rather exist through Allah, and when the greatness of Allah occurs to one, contingent things dwindle to nothing in one's view, and are obliterated from one's thought, and the Real (al-Haqq) dawns upon one's heart, and it is as if one *beholds*. This is termed 'the beholding of the heart.' The beholding of the eye [in this world] is for the Chosen, the Prophet alone, Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace). As for the next world, it shall be for all believers. Allah Most High says, 'On that day shall faces be radiant, gazing upon their Lord' (Koran 75:22–23).

"I have told you," he said after a pause, "that the theophany, the disclosure, the revealing of Allah—by means of it, all existent contingent things with their details are folded up, collapse, and pass from the reflection of the human being, from his thought. The light of the Real shines upon the heart of the human being, so he sees nothing except Allah. This is the heart vision of Allah."

I said, "The servant disappears at that point?"

"Yes," he said. "From himself."

"The servant doesn't remain?"

"Allah was," answered the sheikh, in the words of the hadith related by Bukhari, "and nothing besides."

I said, "It's . . ."

"Beautiful," he said. "Something beautiful. *That* is Sufism."

He never seemed to speak except from his own experience. When asked a question, he would often close his eyes, rock back for a moment, and say "Allah," drawing out the last syllable at length, then open his eyes and begin the answer. In a way, it summarized his whole life: teaching the experiential knowledge of the Divine. "A spiritual path that does not bring one to Allah,"

he used to say, "is a means without an end."

One of his favorite teaching stories, which I later understood was because he was so completely realized in it, was that of Junayd and a disciple, who one day sneezed in the master's presence, then said, "*Al-Hamdu li Llah* (All praise be to Allah)."

Junayd said to him, "Finish, my brother."

The disciple looked at him.

"Say," the master told him, "*al-Hamdu li Llahi Rabbi l-'Alamin* (All praise be to Allah, Lord of All Worlds of Beings)."

The disciple asked, "And where are all worlds of beings, with Allah?"

Junayd replied, "When that which originates in time is conjoined with the Beginninglessly Eternal, what originates in time vanishes, and the Eternal remains." Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was describing the effect of dhikr upon his own heart.

Early on, he showed me a copy of the letters of Mawlay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi printed in the lithographic script found in many older Moroccan books. I copied it out so it would be easier to read, and was impressed by what it said about *mujahada* or subduing the ego (nafs).

"The ego," he told me, "we deal with diplomatically. It wants whatever it wants, with or without the Sacred Law; it doesn't care. So we give it what it wants within the bounds of the Sacred Law, and exact from it what we want: that it serve us, that it rise at night to pray, that it fulfill our duties. This is our diplomacy with the ego."

I had hoped for something a bit more dramatic. "Darqawi says in the *Letters*," I said, "that the truly wretched is he who sees the form of his *nafs*, his ego, and does not strangle it until it dies."

He said, "*Strangling it* means by invocation (dhikr)."

The path he taught differed from methods of Sufism prior to Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, its founder, in a number of ways. Earlier figures such as Dhul Nun al-Misri, Imam Ghazali, and Ibn al-'Arabi, had emphasized mortifying the self with spiritual rigors like sleeplessness, silence, hunger, and solitude, until the ego died, and illumination dawned. The way of Abul Hasan was instead a way of gratitude to the Divine, humbly striving to please

Allah for the sake of Allah, rather than for illumination, seeing His favor in everything, and thanking Him for it. Its work was to attach one's entirety to Allah. Though it had a method, the way was based on Allah's divine concern (*'inaya*) and help for such sincerity of intention, rather than works as such. It had few spiritual rigors besides total reliance on Allah, leaving the offensive or unlawful, awakening the heart to the Divine Presence through dhikr, and realizing one's essential incapacity to thank Allah as He should be thanked. When the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) was asked why he stood in prayer at night until his feet swelled, he replied, "Should I not be a grateful servant?" (*Bukhari* [17], 2.63: 1130. 8). This was what Shadhilis sought in their worship: to show gratitude to the Divine for being. It was not a "spiritual technique" of realization, but rather grounded in the reality of the slave and the Lord from the outset. "The person seeking sainthood," Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman once told me, "is not given it." Rather, when Allah saw a traveller's sincerity, He opened his heart to the Presence, as befitted His infinite generosity. It was a way of hearts, not outward rigors and privations. The sheikh enjoyed the amenities of life in moderation, and was not outwardly engaged in a great deal of physical worship, but only that of an ordinary pious Muslim, with the difference being his inward consciousness of the Divine.

His own experience of the way had convinced him that this knowledge was a living reality that would never die. I once asked him, "The great sheikhs, the huge *awliya* (saints)—how can anyone after them hope to reach their level of *ma'rifa*, of consciousness of the Divine?"

"It is a matter of clouds," he said, "that have come between us and the sun. If one removes the clouds, it is the same sun that has always been there."

"The knowledge of Allah is identical?" I asked.

He said, "It is but 'the primal human disposition (fitra) from Allah Himself to embrace divine truth, with which He has created all mankind'" (Koran 30:30).

The years passed, and one day I came to the sheikh to ask

about marrying someone. She was a girl in the Naqshbandi tariqa who had said that before we could meet, I had to first go to Turkey to see her sheikh. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman paused for a moment, then said she would be fine for me to marry. After a few minutes he remarked: "The Naqshbandi tariqa is one of true spiritual progress (suluk). Like the Shadhili tariqa, it has kept itself pure of violations of Sacred Law, such as musical instruments, which have crept into others. We don't see anything of that in the Naqshbandi tariqa.

"Both the Naqshbandis and the Shadhilis," he said, "use the Supreme Name, the Word of Majesty 'Allah,' though for us it is audible, while for them it is mentioned silently in the heart, and its letters envisioned. But the Naqshbandi is a majestic (jalali) tariqa: discipline, training and training. They reach high ranks, but their predominant state is spiritual contraction (qabd). The Shadhili tariqa is beauteous (jamali)."

"What does 'beauteous' mean?" I asked.

"It is the opposite of majestic," he said. "The divine names have opposites, just as contraction (qabd) is the opposite of elation (bast). Majestically, one sees Allah behind His creatures, as the Naqshbandis do. Beatifically, one sees His creatures behind Allah, and this is the state of the adepts in our way. When contraction comes to one of us, we benefit, for there is little room for missteps in such a state, and we face it with elation. And if elation comes, we must be more careful, as it is a site of mistakes. But an adept is not with either elation or contraction. He is with Allah."

On one of my early visits to him, I had asked, "What does a Sufi make supplication (du'a) to Allah for?" He answered, "For His presence." I had meant to ask what one should request of Allah, but the sheikh had instead answered about the proper spiritual motivation behind supplication.

I was once sitting with him, perhaps a decade or so later, and he mentioned a Koranic verse about Allah, then said as if in an afterthought to himself, "How surpassing eloquent is the use of the third person in the Koran," expressing his wonderment that Allah—so plain, manifest, and present to the reciter—should be referred to in the form "He did" or "He said," as if He were

instead the absent figure of a narrative. It seemed to him a conceit of speech, much as a courtier might say, "His majesty yesterday told me such and such," speaking to his majesty as if he were someone other than the person in front of him. Such was the presence of the sheikh with Allah.

His poetry was born out of his spiritual state, and much of his ongoing legacy remains the stirring performance of his own mystic *qasidas* to the rhythmic dhikr of hadras across the Muslim world. He often said of Sufi poems, "They are scholarly texts (mutun 'ilmiyya)," and would adduce for their Divine provenance the words of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) "Truly, some poetry is wisdom" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.42: 6145. 8), at which he would raise a finger and ask: "Where is *wisdom* from?" Of his own poetic inspiration he used to say, "It comes all at once, after which one sets forth its details." As a poet in an Arabic tradition rich in symbolism, he regularly used metaphors to express the highest spiritual meanings. Like Sufis before him, he used "cup" as a metaphor for the phenomenal universe, including the self, and "wine" for the Divine Presence. One of his most frequently sung odes is

I, the cup, the Beloved, the wine,
  Love has conjoined us;
In a meaning that none knows, my friend,
  But he who is fully ripe;
Seeing in the glass the lamp,
  After obliterating all other;
And the site of manifestation is my niche,
  Though it vanishes away.

Chorus:

The wine has sublimated the substance of my cup,
  Washing it away;
O my wine-pourers from the seas of His Being,
  You have a share for me.

Decant the wine, my Love,
  Pass it round us;

We'll quaff it by the pail or by the pitcher.
Upon a matter destined:
The point is to see the cloudburst,
Raining ever down;
And the garden of my heart from a few droplets
Of it stays ever verdant.
(*Chorus*)
The universe is but from the oceans of His Being
Pouring forth to us;
In it swim and plunge, to see ecstasies,
And your heart's very desire.
Say only "He" in erasure and affirmation,
But not "I";
It will bring illumination: The finest time,
From the Presence of the Beloved.

His *mudhakara* or Sufi teaching was through sessions of singing and expounding poetry at people's homes, public lectures from classic works, and private meetings with students who had taken his hand. During my time with him, I heard him read from 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's *Futuh al-ghaib*, al-Sarraj al-Tusi's *al-Luma'*, Ibn al-'Arabi's *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*, Muhammad al-Buzaydi's *al-Adab al-mardiyya*, Ibn 'Ajiba's *al-Mubahith al-asliyya*, Abul Mawahib al-Tunisi's *Qurratu 'ayn al-tarqiq*, Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi's *'Awarif al-ma'arif*, 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sha'rani's *al-Yawaqit wa al-jawahir* and his *Lata'if al-minan*, Mustafa Naja's *Sharh al-Wadhifa*, and other works. He had heard most of these from Sheikh al-Hashimi, and like his sheikh, would exposit them with the Koran, Prophetic hadith, and maxims of Ibn 'Ata Illah and other Sufi masters, but most of all, as a poet and singer, with verses from the diwans (collected poetic works) of the great Arab masters of mystic poetry. He had memorized much from Ibn al-Farid, Abu Madyan, Ahmad al-'Alawi, 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi, Muhammad al-Harrar, 'Umar al-Yafi, Amin al-Jundi, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husni, and of course his own diwan *al-Hada'iq al-nadiyya fi al-nasamat al-ruhiyya* [The dew-laden gardens: On the soft breezes of the

spiritual], which he edited with his disciple Dr. Mahmud Masri and published in Aleppo in 1996.

His main lesson of the week took place after the dawn prayer on Fridays in his own home high on the side of Mount Qasiyun above Damascus. He would begin with Ibn al-'Arabi's *Futuhat*, which he read consecutively in this lesson for seventeen years. Then he would read from a work of Ash'ari theology such as Sheikh al-Hashimi's *Miftah al-janna*, Ibrahim al-Bajuri's *Hashiya* on the *Matn* of Sanusi, or one of the other books which he finished from beginning to end over the years at this lesson. He regarded experiential ontology as the core of mysticism, and even in his poetry would use, as Sheikh al-Hashimi had in his teaching before him, the nomenclature of rational theology to express the ultimate truths of Sufi experience. Then he would conclude the lesson with a few pages from Kandahlawi's *Hayat al-Sahaba* to emphasize that a true Sufi must gauge his spiritual path by those educated by the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace), the prophetic Companions (Sahaba).

His scrupulousness (wara') resembled that of the early Muslims; his personal practice of Islam was strictness for himself and leniency for others. When told that the soap he had used might have been derived from something ritually impure, he immediately took a shower and changed his clothes. He knew that Hanafis considered the chemical transformation into soap to purify unclean animal products, but he was a Shafi'i, and he adhered to his own school in matters of *taqwa* or godfearingness. In 1988 I travelled with him by car from Medina to Mecca on an umra or lesser pilgrimage, and noted that from the moment we entered the Sacred Mosque until we left for Jedda, the sheikh would not lift his eyes more than two meters ahead of his feet, out of awe for the place, in which even the sins of the eyes are greater than anywhere else. In the last year of his life, I saw him refuse cologne he had been blandly assured was "ritually pure," waving it away impatiently because of the probable alcohol content in it, and forming with his lips, which could no longer speak, the words "How would *you* know?"

His daily *wird*s or litanies of dhikr, besides the Koran and the

sunna dhikrs that Muslims say throughout the day, were four: the *Wird al-'Amm* or General Litany of the tariqa; Abul Hasan al-Shadhili's *Hizb al-Bahr*; the *Wadhifa* or Abu Mawahib al-Tunisi's and Dhafir al-Madani's interlineal prayer upon Ibn Mashish's famous Blessing on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace); and the *Wird al-Khass* or Special Litany of the Supreme Name "Allah," which he recited at night.

He was at his greatest as a spiritual guide, perhaps, in the *khalwa* or spiritual retreat, into which he initiated many of those who took the path. He would impart the Supreme Name to the disciple, and then by degrees bring him to a point of the dhikr at which he would pour his own *yaqin* or certitude into the heart of the disciple in a way not easy to describe, bringing him to a realization of the transcendent Oneness of the Divine. When students began coming from the West and taking the tariqa from him in the mid-1990s, I would sometimes translate for him in their khalwa, and saw how his instruction would differ from student to student. I felt that no one ever understood the deeper reality of the sheikh except the few individuals who were really drowned and washed in the sea of the dhikr in the khalwa. Disciples varied in their level of spiritual aspiration, purity of heart, certitude in the sheikh, and *taqwa*, and consequently in their degree of attainment; and the sheikh would follow up with them in the years afterwards by precept, example, and readings from classical works, so that they could continue to progress by measuring themselves against suitably high standards: the prophets (upon whom be peace), the Sahaba, and the great *awliya* (friends of Allah) of the past.

He never stopped teaching. He once entered the head office of a small religious academy in Damascus with a group of his students and sat down to talk to the director, who bade him wait until he finished some things that were apparently urgent. One thing seemed to lead to another, and the phone kept ringing. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman waited patiently, while his disciples, as the minutes drew on, became less and less so. Finally, the principal of the school set aside his work, looked up at the sheikh and apologized with a smile, and put himself at the sheikh's service.

The sheikh thanked him, asked him how he was, and then said, "I just wanted to make a phone call." After a short call, he got up, thanked the principal, and left with his disciples. They had needed a lesson in patience and manners, and the sheikh had given them one.

But such moments were the exception, and he tended to have a light hand with students. He used to say, "Everyone has a share from his own name," and the meaning of *'Abd al-Rahman*, "Servant of the All-merciful," was part of the way he taught and was. He took disciples as they were, and saw what he could do to improve them. His criticism was generally allusive and indirect, and I myself would often be well down the hill after a visit before I realized that he had intended me by his remarks. "In olden days," he once explained, smoothing his trouser leg, "disciples used to smooth the clothes of the sheikh. But in our days, a sheikh has to smooth the clothes of the disciple."

I remember him being asked on one of his teaching visits to Jordan about long hours of dhikr for disciples after they had entered the khalwa and were permitted to invoke the Supreme Name as long as they wished—something not allowed to those who had not entered it. "Long hours of dhikr?" the sheikh had wondered. "No, it is sufficient to just invoke the Name for five minutes, or ten minutes, before going to bed." After the singing and stories, and the questions and answers, the brethren finally went to sleep on the pallets spread around the floor, and the sheikh repaired to his room, where he invoked the Supreme Name through the night. It was simply his way to tax himself, and make things easy for others. His teaching and own state, however, were to become of "those of breaths" (ahl al-anfas), whose obedience to Allah was perpetual, and from whom not a breath escaped but in the divine good pleasure.

Although always warm and kind, in earlier years he often gave disciples a definite yes or no when they sought advice. When I once asked him on behalf of a disciple from Jordan for permission to add a room onto a house, the sheikh said, "Tell him that if it is necessary for his family or guests, he may go ahead; though if it is only to increase in desire, then no." I was surprised at his

firmness, but then reflected that the disciple was advanced in the path, and would accept it. Most students, however, the sheikh advised by hint and suggestion, and I recall that when some disciples completely ignored his advice and did what they wanted instead, he had murmured, "Had Allah known in them the slightest good, He had made them hear" (Koran 8:23). In most of us he inspired the sense of reverence and awe that normally accompanies a sheikh, and we used to rise when he entered the room, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had commanded those in his mosque to do when Sa'd ibn Mu'adh arrived at it to give judgement, saying, "Rise for the foremost of you" (*Bukhari* [17], 5.44: 3804. S).

His long training in the spiritual path had broken the habits of his ego, and to spend time with him was to see one's own ways change, especially in habits of the mind. On our umra together we pulled up at the Wells of 'Ali at Dhul Hulayfa to the south of Medina to change into *ihram*, the male pilgrims' vesture of two large white cloths, a mantle above and a wraparound below. For some reason, perhaps the bathrooms, the sheikh decided to change from his clothes into *ihram* then and there in the parking lot. He opened the front door of the car, and standing behind it, began to change. He glanced up at my widening eyes and said, "Don't worry, nothing is going to show." Nothing did.

Some hours later as we were rolling down the highway to Mecca, he pulled out his prayer beads and began saying them with his left hand. I watched this from the back seat and tried to figure it out, as he was not left-handed, and the right hand is preferred by the sunna in every noble matter. My mind went up and down to find an answer, but in the end was stymied. I never learned the reason, though never saw him use his left hand again. Sometimes he nudged one's world like that.

He benefited us in many ways, and only towards the end did I begin to see the reality of who and what he actually was. Of the greatest blessings of Allah in my journey with him were the occasions when the sheikh expressed his love for me. We were sitting one evening of those last years on his son's veranda, somehow the topic of children came up, and after a pause he

quietly said, "You mean more than a son to me." I was overwhelmed by a sense of the utter divine favor of the moment. I realized the purity of the love between a master and student in the path to Allah, and that it was sacred to Him for whose sake it was. The sheikh used to frequently mention to us the hadith of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) "Allah Most Blessed and Exalted has said, 'My love is incumbent for those who love each other for My sake, those who sit together for My sake, those who visit each other for My sake, and those who spend on each other for my sake'" (*al-Muwatta'* [69], 2.953–954: 8). He considered this love fundamental to the Sufi work of the tariqa. More tellingly, from the sheikh's point of view, the origin of the love between brethren was in reality His own perfect and divine love of Himself. As Mustafa al-'Arusi, Sheikh of al-Azhar between 1864 and 1870, wrote:

> Know that the real love is the love of the divine Being for itself because of itself, not in consideration of anything else, for it is the origin of all kinds of loves. For everything of love that exists between two is either because of a mutual affinity in their entities, or because of a oneness of attribute, rank, state, or action. Now, the love of Allah for the servant is only because of the affinity of the self-determinations of the Entity in the forms of created things. So in reality it is but love for His own Entity, even if only in a particular aspect and relation. Thus He Most High is the Lover and the Beloved. So understand this (*Nata'ij al-afkar* [4], 1.77).

When I had once asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman why God created the universe when He was already perfect in Himself without need of anything, he answered simply, "That there might be love." He also said, "The traveller proceeds along, but the lover flies." For him, Allah was the First and Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. Man shows his love for the Manifest by interactions with His manifestations that make up the phenomenal order of the world, a stage upon which the provisions of the Sacred Law are acted out. There was no real conflict between love of Allah or other than Allah unless one took the mani-

festations themselves as the object or end of one's love—not when they were a means to love Him who is Manifest in them through obeying His will, which included both loving certain manifestations, and striving against others.

I have since thought more than once about the sheikh's words with me on that evening when we sat together, for when someone said to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), "A man loves a group of people, yet cannot catch up with them," he replied: "A man shall be with whomever he loves" (*Bukhari* [1-], 8.49: 6170, 8).

In later years the sheikh became more absorbed in the divine beauty (jamal) and more acquiescent to events. We were once driving across town in Damascus together during election week, and I was reading the hand-lettered cloth campaign banners that stretched across the street and filled the sky. The tenure of Syria's president had been marked by a series of landslide victories at the polls, and he had now been nominated for yet another term. The sheikh put his face near the windshield, looked up at the banners, and commented, "A feast for calligraphers!" He saw only the good.

He authorized a number of sheikhs to teach the path. It is related that he wrote out such an *ijaza* or authorization and carried it to one of the cities of the north to give to a sheikh there, but when he discussed Ibn al-'Arabi with him, realized that he was not of the same opinion about him as himself, and because he felt this was important, returned to Damascus without giving it to him. He likewise gave an authorization that he later revoked because he found the recipient's character wanting. When asked about the reality of the *ijaza*, he once said, "It is a means for its possessor to defeat his devil." And when asked why sometimes even an authorized sheikh may go bad, he said, "It happens to someone who did not keep the company of his sheikh long enough to absorb his state (hal)." Though Sheikh al-'Alawi has said in the first *qasida* of his diwan, "After the sheikh's death there appears another like him; that is the wont of Allah that never varies," Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to warn, "The path is rare." In a word, he considered the ijaza a necessary condition, but not a

sufficient one. For him, the true heir was someone who had as well inherited a certain *hal* or state with Allah.

On a visit to Amman at the end of his life, he sat in front of the brethren after the dhikr, and one of them had asked, "What is the result of all your years in the tariqa? What does one reach?"

"Being with Allah," he said simply. "A *with*-ness befitting His majesty, that nothing is comparable to."

I last saw him on a visit to his diwan. He had changed over the years, filling more and more with light, his humanness refined more and more into pure meaning. I recall the warm parting touch of his fingers as we kissed each other's hands in farewell, which was where we had begun those years before when he first gave me the way.

After the funeral, I realized that death could take little away from the sheikh because his secret was undying; namely, that everything in the universe existed only through the Divine Reality (haqiqa). The sheikh had been transformed into a *siddiq*, a man of truth, by living this secret until it imbued every breath he took. Without those like him, the alchemy of this transformation would remain merely theoretical. He had been able to impart it, to show people a bridge beyond ordinary human existence. He was a connection not only with a living brotherhood of those travelling the way of sincerity, and with the *hal* or spiritual state of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) transmitted by unbroken personal contact down the centuries, but with the illuminatory *tariqa ilahiyya*, the divine path itself, ascending like a vertical ray of light through all being. This was his secret, and why his path would endure, Allah willing, as long as there were souls to travel it.

We had sat on the edge of a pallet on a narrow wooden bed in a room with a single window, whence light shone down on us, and the sheikh was answering a few questions I had on the last day of my first khalwa. "Will we be together in the next world?" I had asked.

"All those who attained *ma'rifa*, gnosis of the Divine, in this life," he said, "shall have a special place in paradise by a white dune of musk. Our Lord shall manifest Himself to them once a

week, and they will remain drunken with the vision of it for the entire week, when He shall appear to them again, and hence ever shall it be."

So this, I may hope, will be the reuniting in love together of our physical frames, hearts, and souls: in the supreme good-pleasure of God, "and the close of their prayer is ever 'All praise be to Allah, Lord of All Worlds of Beings'" (Koran 10:10).

CHAPTER TWO

THE FAQIH

STOOD in front of the doors of the Darwishiyya on the busy morning street. Some of the grayed wooden pieces of their ancient radial design had fallen out, and the huge iron hasp that locked them at night hung down on one side. I lifted it and knocked twice for the sheikh to let me in.

It was the mid-1980s, when state security was savage, and with a schoolbag under my arm, I tried to look as inconspicuous as possible until I could vanish within. I looked through the crack across the courtyard to see whether Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had heard. The door to his office opened, and images of the high inner walls flashed across its glass panes as he came out into the sunshine. He squinted for a moment, then shuffled in slippers across the flags and around the fountain, undid the latch, and opened one massive door a little. He was a handsome elderly man, with a white trimmed beard, fair skin, and blue eyes, of a little less than middle height, spare of build, broad-shouldered, straight in posture, and impeccably dressed in the long-sleeved shirt, suit-vest, loose trousers, and fez and turban of an earlier day in Damascus.

"*As-Salamu 'alaykum*," I said.

"*Wa 'alaykum as-Salam*," he answered. He stood behind the door for a moment to let me in, and let it lock behind me.

I followed him to the office and took off my shoes below the raised platform that he and his guests sat upon inside. It was spread with a carpet, pallets, and cushions for guests to lean on

against the bookcases. Patches of paint hung down or were already fallen from the centuries-old vaulted ceiling, and the whole narrow chamber was filled with books, some on shelves nearby, others at the far end in disorderly stacks or in cardboard boxes. From his seat facing the door he could keep an eye on the courtyard and gates of the mosque. He lived most of his later life there, sitting with his right knee drawn up, reading books of Shafi'i jurisprudence, his back to a cushion on a wooden panel against the wall. The small table before him was heaped with books and pamphlets, and he had his tea things below.

This morning, as he read out the pages I had brought, he raised the point that in one's financial dealings with other Muslims, if part of their money is illicit, the Hanafi school stipulates that more than 50 percent of their wealth must be lawful (halal) in order for it to be lawful to deal with them, while the Shafi'i school merely requires that one know that *any* part of their income, no matter how little, is lawful.

I thought for a moment, and said, "Then how can you take a wage from this government?"—meaning with its illicit taxes, its plundering of people's money, its bribes and confiscations. He received a monthly salary as imam of the mosque.

He said, "It is permissible in the Shafi'i school to have dealings with someone whose income is admixed between the lawful and unlawful, since one may presume that the part one is taking is from the lawful portion of his income."

"What portion of their income is lawful?" I wondered.

"Don't they provide a service," he asked, "by selling people stamps at the post office?"

I had to admit that they did.

What he did not tell me, and it was only after his death I found out, was that he gave away his entire salary each month in charity, and only ate and supported his family from his own trade in books. Though he could have easily vindicated himself by mentioning this in the lesson, he preferred to hide it, because it was his way to keep such things between himself and Allah.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman always told me that one's state is directly affected by the state of those one chooses as one's

companions. I was to know Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil for eleven years, and was more powerfully affected by his example than by just about anyone I knew in the path besides the sheikh, who also kept his company. The two had been friends and disciples together under Sheikh al-Hashimi, and throughout the eighties, he would visit Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil after the noon prayer, when the latter's friends would gather. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman once told me, "It is obligatory for us to believe in his *wilaya* (saint-hood)." Like Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had been born in Homs, but unlike the sheikh, retained the accent of his hometown the rest of his life. Learned and upright, he was kind, if reserved, and too occupied with his own faults to talk much about those of others.

He would serve his guests tea from a double teapot, the thick dark tea in the smaller pot above heated by the steam of the simmering water used to dilute it from the larger pot below. After they had tea and discussed points of Islamic learning or matters of the day, the guests would leave, and Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil would return to the fiqh readings with which he occupied his afternoons. He read a lot over the forty years he was there.

He would sometimes humble himself, and occasionally me, with his dry humor, for his Sufi practice was the way of complete sincerity, heedless of the blame (malam) of other people, making outwardly no show of the good, and concealing inwardly no trace of the bad. Like other *Malamatiyya* of Sufi history, he would pretend his *akhlaq* or character traits were at a very ordinary level, and always strive to remove anyone's impressions to the contrary. I saw quite a few examples of this over the years.

I once told how I had read that among the first signs of becoming a real Sufi was that one could pull gold coins out of thin air. I was dismayed that this unlikely event was a necessary condition. He waved it aside impatiently saying, "Some people can miraculously pull money out of thin air when they need it, but our sheikhs say it is a greater thing if the money disappears from one's pocket, and one's heart remains exactly the same with one's Lord."

After a moment I said, "Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, if someone

took your money, wouldn't you be upset?"

"I wouldn't just be upset," he said. "I would break his head!" He looked out across the courtyard and gave a chuckle.

On an early visit to Damascus all my money had been stolen in a street restaurant, and finding myself at wit's end, I came to his office where he was sitting with his friends, and I told him what had happened.

He sympathized with me verbally, but offered little other help. The time passed, and I was wondering what would become of me, and I finally got up to leave. The sheikh followed me out the door of the office, beyond sight of his friends, and gave me a sum of money to get back to Jordan. He had merely wanted them not to know.

A man came in one morning and told him of a dream he had purportedly had, saying, "The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) gives you greetings of peace, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil."

"You're a liar," said the sheikh. I later thought that perhaps the man had been leading up to ask him for something. After he had gone, I asked, "How did you know he was lying?"

"I know how I am," he said, meaning not someone who deserved such a greeting. He reminded me of words of the Sufi Ibn Munazil "Whoever lifts away the shade from himself in his own eyes, men thrive in the shade of."

He had been born in 1914 in Homs, where he first took the Sa'diyya tariqa in his teens from Sheikh Sa'd al-Din al-Jibawi, who later sent him to Sheikh Muhammad al-Hashimi in Damascus.

At eighteen years of age he moved to Zabadani, where he studied under Sheikh Ibrahim Tayyib al-Ghazzi, instructor at the school of Islamic judiciary, and Sheikh Muhammad Salim Taha, Mufti of Zabadani. He read major Shafi'i fiqh works such as Imam Ramli's *Sharh al-Zubad*, Jurdani's *Mufid 'awamm al-Muslimin*, Shirbini's *al-Iqna' fi hall alfadh Abi Shuja'*, Bajuri's *Hashiya* or *Commentary* on it, and others, as well as hadith works such as Suyuti's compendium of 10,000 hadiths *al-Jami' al-saghir*, Nawawi's *Riyad al-salihin*, Hakim al-Tirmidhi's work of Sufi hadith commentary *Nawadir al-usul* and Sha'rani's similar work

of a more practical vein *al-'Uhud al-Muhammadiyya*, 'Ali al-Qari's commentary on *Bad' al-amali*, and many others.

When he came to Damascus in 1950, he sold coffee, and printed and sold limited editions of books in traditional Islam for those who wanted them, especially works of Sufism, which he made available to Sheikh al-Hashimi's disciples when the sheikh was teaching from them in his *mudhakara* or lessons. He attended the lessons of a great many ulema in this period, sometimes to the neglect of his small shop, and was finally appointed imam of the Darwishiyya, and married and settled in Damascus for the rest of his life. He lived simply, dressed well but not sumptuously, trimmed his own hair, ate sparingly of plain fare, and never changed from this, even after his sons grew up and found good jobs abroad. He disdained the government, and fell silent when ulema were mentioned who had connections with it.

In autumn of 1982, I took the Shafi'i fiqh manual *Kifaya al-akhyar* [The sufficiency of the good] to Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil and asked him what he thought of translating it. He said that it often mentioned several positions on an issue without telling which was the most reliable for fatwa or authoritative juridical opinion. He suggested instead *'Umda al-salik* [The reliance of the traveller], and I bought a copy from him. As I worked through the translation, the knowledge-based shari'a approach captured my imagination, and I was to add appendices on questions not treated in the text, including biographies of all the scholars mentioned, not only to help English-speaking Muslims know their scholars, but also to clarify by actual examples the difference between the present level of Islamic scholarship and the past.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had knowledge, and I came to produce a book that would try to represent his kind of traditional learning. In all the time I knew him, I never asked him a question that he could not answer, and when I would occasionally follow up with an inquiry for the source, he would pull down one of his many Shafi'i fiqh works, find the passage that contained it, and read it out to me with a certain finality before taking off the pince-nez he added to his usual glasses when he read. Only rarely would he say,

"The *fuqaha* [pl. of *faqih* or legal scholar] have not written anything about this, but it appears that ..." then give his opinion. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman once described him to me as "above a mufti in knowledge." The existence of such people was something I had not been aware of. When one meets a university professor of shari'a, one gets the impression of a senior student who is but more widely read than the students he teaches; but when one meets a traditional alim, a scholar, one gets the impression of someone who *knows* the actual content of the shari'a by having learned and memorized; in a word, someone with *'ilm* or knowledge.

A second difference was one of attitude. Traditional figures like Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman and Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil impressed me deeply as Muslims, men whose concept of spirituality was to learn the divine command, hold it absolutely sacred, and do their utmost to live it, outwardly and inwardly. They had apparently taken this attitude from the living example of their own teachers, and so on, back to earliest times. Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil was a genuinely humble man, for example, not out of unawareness of his level of learning, but rather because Allah had ordered him to be humble.

I once made a remark to him about someone who gave one of the notoriously lax fatwas of the present time, saying that one had to respect his opinion, since he was an alim. "An alim?" he said, looking incredulous. "The first thing an alim knows is that the next world is more important than this one." He was totally what he taught in this respect, and his approach of *'amal bi al-'ilm*, 'living what one knows,' was also something I later sought to convey in my translation.

I ended up sitting with him a lot to review the pages of Arabic that I had prepared in Jordan while reading the work there with Sheikh Yunus Hamdan, a disciple of the late Sheikh al-Kurdi. I would photocopy the work's pages, which I had interspersed with lines of its commentary, and come to Damascus for extended periods to read the montage with Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, ask questions, record answers, then add them to the translation. I would later return to recheck every point a second time, reading

what I had recorded from him the first time and asking, "Is this your position?"

As the days passed into years, my heart became attached to him, and in the end, I realized, despite the veils he habitually put between himself and the eyes of others, that he was among the greatest I had ever known in the Sufi path, above and beyond his being a scholar of the next world and an heir of the prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace). He benefited me by his words and by his silence.

In Sufism he was widely read, and had perfected Imam Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* [Revival of religion's sciences] to an extraordinary degree in his practice. Ghazali's twelve signs of otherworldly as opposed to this-worldly scholars, for example, aptly describe him. I summarize them here for brevity of translation:

> He does not seek this world by his religious learning, for at very least a scholar is someone aware of this world's wretchedness, triviality, sordidness, and ephemerality; and the next world's magnificence, permanence, blessings, and vastness—and that the two are opposites.
>
> His deeds do not belie his words, and he does not tell anyone to do something without himself being the first to do it.
>
> He is devoted to knowledge beneficial in the next world, that which increases desire for acts of worship, and he shuns branches of religious learning that are of little benefit, or mainly debate and gossip.
>
> He is disinclined to luxury in food and drink, enjoyment of clothes, and embellishment of furnishings and housing, preferring less therein, emulating the early Muslims (Allah have mercy on them), and inclining towards the minimum in everything.
>
> He keeps as far from rulers as possible, never going to visit them as long as there is any way to evade them.
>
> He is reluctant to give formal legal opinion (fatwa), refrains from verdicts about matters unclear, and avoids giving opinions whenever he can.

His main concern is knowledge of the inward and keeping watch over his heart, knowing the path of the next world and travelling it, sincerely hoping to be shown it by combating his ego (mujahada) and spiritual vigilance over himself (muraqaba), since subduing the ego leads to beholding the Divine (mushahada).

He perpetually strives to deepen his inward certitude (yaqin), which is one's capital in religion.

He is somber, subdued, bowed of head, and spare of words, the awe of the Divine being plain in his manner and dress, movements and rest, speech and silence. No one sees him without being reminded of Allah Most High, his mien bespeaking his works.

He mainly seeks knowledge of spiritual works and what vitiates them, what disturbs the heart, what raises baseless misgivings (waswasa), and what provokes evil, for preventing evil is the basis of religion.

He relies in his branches of learning upon genuine insight and what he knows from the bottom of his heart, not merely upon what he finds by reading treatises and books, or blindly repeating what he has heard another say. For the only one unconditionally followed is he who brought us the Sacred Law (Allah bless him and give him peace), in what he commanded and stated. The prophetic Companions are but followed because their deeds indicate what they heard from the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace).

He shuns spurious matters in religion newly begun [such as, for Ghazali, purely speculative scholastic theology], even if a scholarly majority adopt them, being undeceived by what was inaugurated after the Companions (Allah be well pleased with them); but rather dedicating himself to learning how they were, and what they did in their lives (*Ihya' 'ulum al-din* [33], 1.53–70).

Lest the latter two paragraphs give pause, I should add that Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil knew very well the extent of the knowledge of the *mujtahid* or 'scholar qualified to issue expert legal opinion on the basis of primary scriptural texts' to whom Imam Ghazali

is referring here, and he used to say: "A Muslim who gives the ruling of Allah Most High on a point of Islamic fiqh is either a mujtahid, or else reporting from a mujtahid. To find out how he knows, if you are yourself a mujtahid, you may ask for his evidence from the Koran and hadith; though if not, you are only entitled to ask him what mujtahid he is reporting from."

He would not give a fatwa unless he had read it somewhere, or he was absolutely sure of it. The shari'a and the *haqiqa* or 'ultimate truth' were aspects of one single reality for him, and he used to say, "It is not permissible to teach opinions that depart from a point upon which Ahl al-Sunna [Sunni Orthodoxy] are agreed." He used to particularly warn against Muhammad 'Abduh, and against Shatibi's *Muwafaqat*, of which he would say: "Beware. And let him beware."

He also felt that modern scholars had let down the Umma, the world Muslim community, by not explaining the unlawfulness of three things. One was dealing in usury (riba) by interest-bearing contracts and insurance policies, whether in Muslim or non-Muslim lands. Another was adopting as law in most Arab countries the position of Ibn Taymiyya and some of the Shiites that a man's three pronouncements of divorce at a single time count as but one pronouncement. A third was that photographic images are not the "pictures of living things" forbidden by Islam. The darkness of these questions had overshadowed the present age, in Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil's eyes, except for those of the awliya whom Allah protected.

He was an unsheathed sword against Salafi or Wahhabi ideas, and he had a bundle of pamphlets refuting various positions of theirs that he had collected over the years. These were done up with a string, and he would lay them down on the rug in front of him and untie them when he needed to provide me with a text on one of the many questions that I brought up about them. I was living in Jordan, where Nasir al-Din al-Albani had settled and gathered many followers, and Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil would answer the things I had heard from them one by one. He looked upon the official bodies of Wahhabi ulema in some places as little better than, in his words, "outward charades of knowledge."

I mention here his rather direct criticisms of others, but must add that they were rare, and made by way of trying to educate a student. They stand out in a lifetime of kindly dealings with people for being the exception, and I but mention them for the standards they reveal of a scholar close to Allah, when the trust of knowledge forced him to say something that departed from his usual politeness. He was not a controversialist, but merely regarded traditional Islamic fiqh, tenets of faith, and Sufism as inseparable, and an attack against any of them as an attack against all of them, against the reality and integrity of Islam itself. The focus of religion for him was the heart's personal experience of ultimate reality, and perhaps as someone who had truly beheld that reality, he was adamantly opposed to anything that might close the door to it for subsequent generations. Only truth made him speak against falsehood.

When something particularly gladdened him, he would sing to himself some lines from a *qasida* of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Himsi in praise of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace):

O Shining Star of the Age,
O Light of our Originator;
But for you there had not flowed
The light of guidance in us . . .

When I asked one day about the benefits of visiting graves, a practice deplored by Wahhabi "reformers," he said: "There are seven benefits to it. First, it is sunna to do so [as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "I had forbidden you to visit graves, but now go visit them" (*Muslim* [74], 2.672: 977. s)]. Second, sober reflection on death (i'tibar) softens the visitor's heart: how many a stony-hearted person was altered by visiting the dead and realizing that he too would someday die. Third, realizing that the deceased is alone in his grave without family or friends, with only his works, waiting for Judgement Day, makes the heart less attached to worldly things. Fourth, the dead hear their visitors, and like to be visited. Fifth, if one recites something of the Koran and donates the reward of it to the deceased, [all four Sunni schools of fiqh concur that] it benefits him. Sixth,

the visitor too has the reward for reciting the Koran. Seventh, the light of the deceased is reflected in the hearts of those whom Allah benefits with it."

He once read me Zirikli's somewhat dry observation, in his biographical dictionary *al-A'lam*, about the later life of the Moroccan scholar Ibn 'Ajiba, that "then Sufism overcame him."

I asked, "What does he mean, 'Then Sufism overcame him'?"

"Whoever Sufism happens to," he said, "it overcomes."

He was speaking personally in this, for if his outward activities revolved around Sacred Law, his focus was Allah. I once asked him who could benefit from the works of Ibn al-'Arabi, and he said, "Someone who combines shari'a and *haqiqa*."

He was a very private man. More than fifteen years passed after he left this world before I learned that he had been of Al al-Bayt, of noble descent from the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). He had never seen the need to mention it. Nor for that matter can I remember either of us ever asking the other about family or kin.

As a Sufi, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil was realized in two great maxims, which he mentioned to me more than once. The first was to "be with Allah without any creation, and be with creatures without any ego," which summed up his Sufism. The second comprised the attitude of the Sufi towards Sacred Law, and was the position of Qushayri that "the Sufi does not even commit what is superior not to (khilaf al-awla)," which was to say: "let alone the offensive (makruh) or outright unlawful (haram)."

I once asked, "What is *mujahada*?" meaning spiritual self-discipline.

He said, "It is to first abandon what all four of the schools are unanimous about being haram, second to abandon what the schools differ about being haram, and third to abandon what is unanimously held to be offensive." He paused, then asked, "Do you need more?"

I said, "No, that's enough for a few years."

Once someone was describing some "Sufis" in the vicinity, a narrative which Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil put to an end by the single comment "They smoke." He saw no need to say anything

further, for Imam Khatib al-Shirbini had said in his *Iqna'*, "All that harms the body or intellect is unlawful (haram)," to which Bujayrimi in his *Hashiya* had added: "from which the unlawfulness of smoking is plain" (*al-Bujayrimi* [2], 4.276). It was thus a decisive text in the Shafi'i school, sufficient proof for Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil that no real Sufi of any other school with precaution in his *din*, his religion, would ever smoke.

He was the same way with pictures of living things. He had given me some twenty rigorously authenticated (sahih) hadiths that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) forbade images of animate life. The question was differed upon among Islamic scholars, the images that all agreed were permissible being images reflected in mirrors or cast by shadows, while the images unanimously considered unlawful were statues. Between the two, those absolutely permissible and those absolutely unlawful, was a continuum of kinds of images that scholars disagreed about. Scholars who deemed photographs unlawful, for example, found them closer to pictorial images, while those who held them permissible said they were closer to reflections in a mirror or shadows. Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil regarded the latter position as a patent falsehood, and whenever he entered a house where there was a photograph of someone on the wall, he would turn around and leave. This was well known about him in Damascus, and some would hide their pictures when he was invited. I once said, "Some tariqa people have them, and as long as the question is one that the scholars differ about, why not leave it alone?" He said, "The schools agree that it is haram to put them up on walls out of respect for the person pictured." And that was that.

He had a keen intelligence, and was concerned to teach me how the faculty of intelligence fit into the nature of the integral human being. For him, as for Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, man was body, mind, and soul; none was reducible to the other, and felicity consisted in worshipping God with all. The body's worship lay in Islam, submission to the external particulars of the revelation. The mind's lay in Iman, 'true faith' or certitude in the eternal truths revealed to the prophets. The soul's lay in the direct apprehension of the Divine in Ihsan, or 'worshipping Allah

as though one sees Him,' through *basira*, the faculty of mystic vision.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had heard a lot of rhetoric in his life about updating the religion along the lines of the intellectual horizons of certain late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reformers in Damascus, Cairo, and Baghdad. Like other modernisms, whether in Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, this one had little content of its own that could be described as religiously new, but was essentially a negative movement away from what had previously been, seeking in the name of progress and reason to assimilate Islam to European norms. Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, aware of the times and issues, explained to me the role of reason in religion.

"There is nothing in Islam that contradicts reason," he said. "But the reason of the prophets is more perfect than our reason." As a Muslim, he saw the prophets upon a high ground of divine inspiration and revelation that enabled them to see further than others to eternity, beyond the horizons that bind ordinary minds. The ethically good was not so because human minds deemed it good or sympathized with it, but because Allah had asked that it be done. And the ethically bad was not so because human minds deemed it bad or found it emotively distasteful, but because Allah had asked that it not be done. As Wittgenstein once remarked, "It is more profound to believe that something is good because God commands it than to believe that God commands it because it is good" (*Encyclopedia of Religion* [29], 15.429), though Muslims like Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil believed this for its truth rather than its profundity. Imam Ghazali had in his own day answered rationalist doubts about the particulars of revealed religion by saying:

> The way that the medicines of acts of worship work, their limits and amounts being specified and determined by the prophets, cannot be comprehended by the apparatus of intellectuals' "intelligence." Rather, it is necessary to follow the example of the prophets, to whom these properties are perceived through prophetic light, not the apparatus of the mind (*al-Munqidh min al-dalal* [34], 58).

This was the view of Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, though he also affirmed with the Moroccan Sufi Ibn 'Ajiba (d. 1224/1809) that *'aql*, true intelligence, was "the light by which the beneficial is distinguished from the detrimental, and which keeps its possessor from committing iniquities" (*Mi'raj al-tashawwuf* [46], 27), which Ibn 'Ajiba in the same passage explains is of two kinds, a greater intellect and a lesser intellect. The greater intellect is the primal intellect which the descendants of Adam possessed in the presence of the Divine (before entering their bodies in this world) when they were asked, "'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Aye, we so attest'" (Koran 7:172). The lesser intellect is imbued in the servant from the time of conception and birth, and expands with its fund of experience of the material world until it comes to occlude the greater intellect, whose light it nevertheless continues to reflect, like a mirror from which rust needs to be polished away, "its light," Ibn 'Ajiba says,

> continually increasing by worship, spiritual training, and purification from caprice (hawa) until the servant enters the station of mystic excellence (Ihsan), and the lights dawn on him of direct knowledge of the Divine ('irfan), so that his light merges with the light of the greater intellect, as the light of the moon merges with the rising of the sun. He then beholds secrets of the unseen and things he previously could not, for the lesser intellect's light is feeble, noticing but that the created world requires its Creator and realizing little beyond that, as opposed to the greater intellect, which apprehends the eternal Creator both before manifestation and after, through the purity of its light and the intensity of its vision (*Mi'raj al-tashawwuf* [46], 27).

What I saw in Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil was a man trained by the exacting standards of Sufism who knew by personal experience the distinction between these two intellects. The greater intellect was attained by keeping the company of a spiritual guide (murshid) who had himself thus attained it, and it culminated in *basira* or mystic vision, which beheld nothing but the pure Being of the Divine. As Abu Madyan said, "The faculty of mystic vision

(basira) is the very realization of spiritual benefit." The lesser intellect was but analogical, disclosing only what was reducible in at least some aspects to the previously known. It beheld only the created, and in matters of spiritual training a murid had to give precedence over his own analogical intellect to the "greater intellect" of his guide. As Suhrawardi says:

> Whenever a murid is puzzled by something about how the sheikh is, he should recall the story of Moses with Khidr (upon them be peace), how Khidr would do things Moses would condemn, and when Khidr revealed their secret to him, Moses would retract his condemnation. For what a murid censures is because of how little he knows about that which is from the sheikh, for the sheikh has an excuse for everything on the tongue of Sacred Knowledge and wisdom (*'Awarif al-ma'arif* [97], 409).

This typified the attitude of the Sufis, who have said, "A sheikh among his disciples is like a prophet among his nation"—and in truth, seldom did one find the ultimate benefit of the tariqa except in disciples with the greatest deference to their murshid. It crossed my mind more than once during my years with Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil that such trust might be a reef upon which the ship of seekers could be wrecked by pretenders. He taught me that a true guide must have two indispensable marks, one of which the seeker could perceive directly, the other of which he could infer by signs, even before knowing it in his heart through the unfolding of subsequent events.

The first was that a sheikh be outwardly realized in Sacred Law. This Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil regarded as the first line of defense against deception, and he more than once quoted to me from a poem about sheikhs of the path by Ibn al-'Arabi,

> Do not follow anyone whose shari'a leaves him,
> Even if he should bring you tidings from Allah Himself
> (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* [48], 2.364).

In his view, the proper *adab* or 'conduct' of the seeker consisted in knowing the rulings of the shari'a which there was no latitude to dispense with—other than plain wrongdoing—and if one's

sheikh premeditatedly gave himself latitude in them, to realize he was not a sheikh and simply leave. Those who would not, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil believed, deserved what they got.

The second mark was that a sheikh inwardly know the immensity of the Sea of Being through what Ibn 'Ajiba has above termed the "greater intellect." This was something plainly more difficult for seekers to intuit about their guide, but in later years, I came to believe it was generally accompanied by several other signs. For one, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman regarded such inward experience as the necessary and sufficient *cause* of a dervish's full realization of the outward Sacred Law, such that if the latter were absent, so too, one could infer, was the former. I heard him say more than once: "Whoever experiences the Divine knows; and whoever does not, veers." A Sufi who committed deliberate iniquities was by that fact bogus. For another, a true murshid inevitably had awe and emulation of his own sheikh, "awe" meaning to know that a disciple cannot surpass his master, even if he might someday hope to equal him; and "emulation" meaning to ascribe his own *tawfiq* or success from Allah to having known a true master, and that continued tawfiq meant to solve problems in the same way as he. These signs could be seen in murshids even without beholding their inward state, just as one could recognize a peril to followers in would-be guides who referred only to themselves. Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had only experienced the *tarbiya* or 'spiritual training' of Sheikh al-Hashimi, and he knew the huge difference meeting and knowing such a man could make in one's life. But he had also seen pretenders, and from time to time he warned against them.

When a Western Muslim came to him one morning to ask about buying the *Mawaqif* of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, they got into a conversation about Sufism, and Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had asked him if he had a sheikh. The young man remarked that his sheikh had died. He presently qualified this by noting that the sheikh was still physically alive, but had "died" in the sense of committing violations of the shari'a.

"Sheikh?" Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had snorted. "Sheikh? He was but given rise to by the times."

He inculcated *taqwa* or godfearingness by word and deed, and felt that practicing it was the special responsibility of those who taught Sacred Law. "If we don't have taqwa," he once asked me, "who is supposed to?" When he saw me, for instance, wearing two rings one day, he told me it was something offensive.

I said, "Suyuti has a fatwa in his *Hawi li al-fatawi* that permits wearing even several rings at the same time."

He took down a book and showed me what he had just said. "The offensiveness exists," he said. That was the way he took Sacred Law, combining between the different positions to find the way of taqwa, the way of scrupulousness in obeying the divine command.

He was interested, above all, from each book in that which one could personally practice, and benefit from in the next life. When I watched him pray his sunna prayers in his little office after having led the prayer in the main mosque, I noted he did not use the opening supplication of the Shafi'i school, or the Hanafi, or the Hanbali—each of which adopts the words of a different Prophetic hadith—but rather he recited all three, one after the other, so as to combine all of them. His approach of personally practicing as much fiqh as possible made him a compendium of practical answers in applying the religion to one's life.

I asked him for example about the hadith that "the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) used to sleep half the night, rise and pray for a third of it, then sleep a sixth of it" (*Bukhari* [17], 2.63: 1131), and he said, "The period termed 'night' here begins whenever one goes to sleep, and ends at dawn." It was rare to find such details with others. When I asked him about a verse of poetry I had heard from him "Whoever finds no teacher, let him travel," he said, "Travelling for knowledge is obligatory when one can't find instruction in something that is obligatory, and recommended when one can't find instruction in something that is recommended."

Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil came to mind when in after years I visited Aden, and a scholar got up after a meal and spoke about the conduct of the shari'a scholar (ādāb al-faqih). He mentioned four things: *'izzat al-nafs* or self-respect, meaning a certain per-

sonal level of manliness and chivalry: *da'wat al-majlis* or waiting until one has been invited to teach rather than imposing oneself on others; *niyya* or having the proper 'intention' of teaching for Allah; and *talaqqi* or having first been 'directly imparted' the knowledge one teaches from a living teacher, not only so the knowledge may be correctly understood, but so the *hal* or state of the teacher may affect one. I have since seen a number of enterprising students who first took their knowledge from books, perhaps admixed with some lessons with scholars, but no long apprenticeship in the craft of the faqih, and who then began to teach others. They were looked up to for their wide readings, but because of little learning by *talaqqi*, they lacked the *hal* of the faqih, and were often haunted by prior character traits such as anger, pride, and envy, which are unaffected by reading. Those who took knowledge from such students were misled into believing these normal; and many acquired obsessive doubts (waswasa) about their own religious practice, not realizing this had to do with the state of their teachers.

To be sure, there are students of living teachers who also do not improve much in character, for the reason that learning by direct contact, even if prolonged, is necessary for this benefit but not in itself sufficient to bring it about. That is, for *talaqqi* to produce a teacher who is a true heir of the prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace), several other conditions probably have to be met, among them that the teacher himself be such an heir, that the student recognize him as such, that the student's admiration lead him to emulate him not only in his learning but in his character, and that Allah give him success in this. Because Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had first taken his knowledge from his sheikhs in this way, when it was later enriched by readings on his own they fit into the matrix laid down by the original *talaqqi*. The inheritance had become his.

Habib 'Umar of Tarim in Yemen told me he was once travelling through Syria, and went to the Darwishiyya and prayed the noon prayer behind Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil. At the end of the prayer, the sheikh had performed the two forgetfulness prostrations, which everyone following him repeated after him before

he closed with Salams. Habib 'Umar went up to him afterwards, greeted him, and shook his hand.

"Why did you prostrate for forgetfulness?" he asked him. "I didn't see you do anything that called for it."

"I paused at length between two prostrations," said the sheikh. "In the Hanafi school delaying an integral (rukn) of the prayer, even for a brief time, necessitates it."

Although a forgetfulness prostration by the imam of a mosque was a humbling public admission of a personal mistake, and his only motive for it was a ruling not found in his own Shafi'i school of jurisprudence, but rather in the Hanafi school which he did not follow, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had performed it by way of a wider definition of taqwa.

Habib 'Umar had then asked him for a "general ijaza" in all of his *wird*s or daily litanies of dhikr, and his chains of transmission of learning from his sheikhs. It was a Yemeni custom to ask for such a general ijaza anytime one met a scholar of learning and merit. "General" meant that it was entirely for the *baraka* or 'blessedness' of connection, and did not have the significance of any qualification or mastery on the part of the receiver, as ijazas normally do anywhere outside of Yemen and the Hijaz.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had wept. Finally he said, "All our works, all our knowledge—all this goes, and nothing remains except what was purely for the sake of Allah." He had no other ijaza to give than that.

If unbending in the command of Allah, he was easygoing in matters relating to his ego. He once related to me how one of the ulema of Damascus within living memory used to lock his door when he began a lesson that he gave. Any student who came thereafter was locked out and considered to have missed his lesson.

The very next day, I arrived two hours late for our own lesson, chagrined as to what the sheikh might have to say after yesterday's story. I had had some things to do at Immigration and Passports, and thought I would finish sooner.

"The good," Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil said, "is in what actually comes."

At the same time, he was the implacable foe of all sham and pretension, especially from would-be Sufis. At a pause one day between pages, I told him about something on my mind. A young man who had given me a room in the Midan quarter of the city had spoken to me a few days earlier about a man he knew with "a remarkable state with Allah," and had subsequently persuaded me to go with him to visit.

When we dropped in, the atmosphere in the room seemed oracular. As the session progressed, the seer made a number of observations that seemed directed towards me, some of them unsettling, some correct. At one point he said, "The circle of mystic gnosis cannot be completed until one's heart is connected with the heart of the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, in a great circle." This he illustrated by joining his hands above his head. He said this with such convincingness that after I left, I wondered if there might not be something to it. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman had certainly never said anything like this. Had we missed something?

Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil listened to the story carefully and asked a few questions.

"He's a gum-chewer," he said finally.

I looked at him in surprise.

"Why do you go around to all these people?" he asked. "You'll just confuse yourself with all this listening to everyone. People say all sorts of things. What do you want with them?" The light reflected from his glasses as he looked out.

"A gum-chewer," he repeated.

I was humbled, but relieved. He had hit the nail on the head; and it was neither the first nor last time his knowledge was to rid me of something completely useless.

He was the rare combination of a true faqih and true Sufi. When I once asked about a particular act of disobedience mentioned in a book, he paled with fright. Sitting with him in his office, tears would come to his eyes when we read something that reminded him of his shortcomings. He had worked on himself a long time.

The hadra or 'public dhikr' of the Shadhilis at the Nuriyya

Mosque on Fridays, first under Sheikh al-Hashimi, and later Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, was an essential part of his Sufism and his life. He was a Shafi'i, convinced of the school's mastery of matters of evidence, and that it was obligatory for a non-*mujtahid* to follow a school. It was the law of his life, his connection with the Divine, and since it contained nothing against the hadra but rather praised it as dhikr, he seldom missed it after the Friday prayer if he could help it. "A week in which there is no hadra is lacking," he would say. I benefited from him in the path because I regarded him as a higher man, and he regarded the spiritual path, in its entirety, as the way to become one.

I was once making dhikr and Allah showed me a vision of Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil as a vast mountain that towered above me, after which I was convinced Allah had shown me the spiritual rank of one of His awliya.

He used to enjoin me when I recited the Supreme Name "Allah" to fully pronounce the final *h*, saying, "It is the *h* of *huwiyya* (identity)." When I asked him about the remedy for distraction by our own *farq* or apartness from Allah, he recited the two verses from 'Umar al-Yafi

When we ail, we treat ourselves
With Your Remembrance.
And we leave the Remembrance sometimes,
And we lessen.

When one of the sheikhs of the path came from North Africa in the 1960s, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil had been nominated to him as someone who could teach the brethren as sheikh of the tariqa, but when the visitor had asked him, he refused. He had knowledge of Sufism, but preferred that someone else might teach it. He regarded the limelight as the opposite of the light of *ikhlas* or spiritual sincerity.

Because of this, or perhaps because the divine rigor (jalal) seemed to predominate in him, after he died people told me that he had had few other students. When I finished *Reliance of the Traveller* with him, I appended a biographical section on those mentioned in the texts, but when I came to his name, it proved

harder than pulling teeth to get any information out of him about his learning. "How many scholarly legal texts (mutun) have you memorized?" I asked.

"Not one," he said—literally true perhaps, because someone who has memorized a number has not memorized just one.

Our association was to continue for several years after I had finished the *Reliance*, and it was when Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman had put me in another khalwa in 1993 that Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil left this world. They sent me a note while I was making the dhikr that he had passed on. I remembered when I had last gone to see him at his apartment. He had been wearing a stocking cap, propped up a little on his back in bed. He had followed a position in the Shafi'i school that it was permissible to refrain from all medical treatment, so his end came and went quickly. The final thing he had said to me from his bed was two verses from the Arab poet al-Babbagha':

> This world says with her mouth wide open:
> "Beware, beware, of my seizing and killing;
> Let not the beauty of my smile seduce you,
> For if my words rejoice you,
> Yet my deeds shall make you weep."

I saw him only once more, in a vision, after attending his funeral and I had again returned to the khalwa and was making dhikr. He appeared in front of me, floating as if upon a height, dressed in the suit and fez and turban he had worn in life. I told him, "You're safe, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil." He looked beatific and serene, but with perhaps typical reticence, added nothing to what he had told me while alive. He had told me many things, and his state had been even more telling. Darimi relates that 'Imran ibn Muslim al-Minqari said:

> I told Hasan [al-Basri] one day about something he had said, "O Abu Sa'id, that is not what the fiqh scholars (fuqaha) say." He said: "Woe to you! And have you ever seen a single faqih? The faqih is but the abstinent of this world, the desirous of the next, the discerning in his religion, the perpetual in his Lord's worship" (*Darimi* [23], 1.94: 299. 8).

I had met a faqih in the person of Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil. May Allah be well pleased with him, and reunite us in the abode of His generosity.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NEIGHBORHOOD IMAM

NOTHER I benefited from in the path was Sheikh Yunus. He had been pointed out to me as one of those who Sheikh al-Kurdi had particularly devoted himself to training, and someone who had kept up afterwards. I had arrived in Jordan eight years after the death of Sheikh al-Kurdi, and when I took the path from Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman in 1982, I moved from Huwwara, where I had been living while teaching English at Yarmouk University in Irbid, to the nearby village of Sarih, where Sheikh al-Kurdi's tomb and mosque were. I lived next to the mosque in a house built by Sheikh 'Adel when he had been Sheikh al-Kurdi's servant in the latter years of the sheikh's life.

In the fall of 1982, I began to translate *Reliance of the Traveller*, and I needed someone to help me read it in Jordan before checking it with Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil in Damascus. I went to Sheikh Barakat, mufti of Irbid, but he was too advanced in years to offer much help. At length I went to Amman, moving to the Kharabsheh neighborhood where Sheikh Yunus was imam of the mosque. He had read the Shafi'i fiqh work *Hashiya al-Bajuri* with Sheikh Barakat while in the north, and had recently finished a degree in shari'a at the University of Jordan.

He was thirty-nine when we first met, ten years older than I, and had been born in the family tent in the Marka area east of Amman in 1944. His generosity and openheartedness reflected his bedouin origins. He had a broad, honest face, was full in figure, and perhaps a little less than average in height. He had a

large black beard, and wore a white cloth cap with a white headcloth over it, the ordinary *jallabiyya* or full-length men's shift of rural Jordan, and leather sandals on his broad bare feet. He always seemed to be beaming, especially when he had guests. Sheikh al-Kurdi had remarked of him that "he is loved by the very ground that bears him up and the sky that overspreads him." And when once asked who was his successor in Jordan, he had said, "I don't have anyone who could be sheikh, but I hope for good from Sheikh Yunus." To put the word *sheikh* into context, in colloquial Jordanian it often means anyone with a beard who prays, not necessarily a spiritual master.

After Sheikh al-Kurdi's death, there had been disagreements and troubles among disciples about who should be his successor in Jordan. His sole written ijaza had been to Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman in Damascus, and he had told his students to refer to Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman's judgement on any point of disagreement. This was ignored by various claimants, who each said that Sheikh al-Kurdi had intended them to be his successor, even if he had not given them an explicit ijaza. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman had felt that none of them were ready, but that they should cooperate as brothers until he could appoint someone to guide them as a sheikh. Instead there were claims and dreams, counterclaims and counterdreams, until by main force one of the number defied all challengers and became the effective sheikh.

Sheikh Yunus went to Damascus at this period and entered a prolonged khalwa with Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, who later said, "His dhikr was very good." Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman also once told Sheikh Fayez al-Ja'bari, another disciple of Sheikh al-Kurdi, that "whoever wants to visit two of the awliya in Jordan should visit Sheikh Yunus," then mentioned another figure Sheikh Fayez had known in the path.

The result of the vying for leadership was that Sheikh Yunus entirely withdrew from the brethren, and went off in turn to several remote villages for a space of years to serve as imam of their small local mosques, and spend his nights in invocation of the Supreme Name, apart from anyone. He emerged with a state that could be felt by sitting with him.

Perhaps out of wariness for adulation, when he moved to Amman to serve as imam in the mosque in Kharabsheh while completing a shari'a degree at the University of Jordan, he was, if possible, even more private than before. He seemed to typify the advice of Shibli at the end of his life "Remain alone, efface your name from the Sufis, and face the wall until you die."

At the same time, he was gracious and affable with guests, and did not seem to mind talking about anything, except himself and Allah. Seldom would he say anything about Sufism, and the few of us who regularly kept his company realized his preference and did not ask. Rather, we sat with him for other ostensive purposes, and understood what we could between the lines. He would act amazed by everything one said, and thereby lead one to talk, for he always preferred to listen. He worked with me on the *Reliance* by reading through one chapter of the Arabic text at a time, and expositing it in light of its commentary for my initial translation, which I later followed with two complete revisions.

At group prayer, his Koran recital was beautiful and his delivery very soulful, and he had studied with Sheikh Sa'id Sammur in Zarqa, who was extremely exacting. If he seldom spoke about spiritual things in his conversation, the parts of the Koran that he selected to recite were often very telling, and reminded me of the words of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman "The gnostic ('arif) is he who speaks of your secret while you are silent." There were many instances of his reciting things at prayer that were on my mind, but I had not said or even hinted at.

On Fridays, he would mount the pulpit to give the weekly sermon, and his face would grow red and his voice high and strained with the stress he felt at being looked at and listened to by a mosque full of people. After the Friday prayer, I would be invited to lunch, along with Hajj Kamal, a hand-to-hand combat instructor at the time in the Jordanian Special Forces who was also of bedouin origin, and often in uniform; sometimes Hajj Falih, who was likewise in the army then; and sometimes 'Abd al-Karim of Hofa, who was imam of the mosque by Hajj Kamal's house in Khalda. We all accepted Sheikh Yunus's reticence about spiritual things, and just sat with him because we liked his company.

An aspect of him we saw perhaps less was as a husband and father, though it was plain he loved his wife and children, and like most Arabs, children in general. At the two Eids he would fill his freezer with ice-cream treats and give one to each of the neighbor kids who came by, with a bit of money.

The tasks he undertook at the mosque included washing the bodies of men who had died. He did this alone, and would emerge from the washing and shrouding looking physically taxed, yet serene. He always listened to the daily obituary notices on the Jordanian radio, and seldom missed the funeral of anyone he knew or their nearest kin.

Throughout most of my time with him, Sheikh Yunus and I would ride with Sheikh 'Adel in his van to study with Sheikh Nuh al-Qudah, who was mufti of the Armed Forces at the time. From 1984 to 1989, we were reviewing with Sheikh Nuh the notes he had written in the margins of my Arabic montage of the *Reliance* and its commentary as he read through it. In after years, he taught us 'Abd al-Ghani al-Ghunaymi's commentary on the *'Aqida* of Abu Ja'far al-Tahawi, and portions of other works.

As I lived and studied with Sheikh Yunus, and performed my five prayers behind him as imam, I grew accustomed to his ways, and came to love him. He was a *dhakir*; someone steeped in the dhikr. Sadly, like many imams, he had a host of volunteer advisors among the frequent mosque-goers, each of whom expected him to follow their advice regardless of its contradicting the others'.

Sheikh Yunus disliked telling them to mind their own business, though his free spirit chafed at having so many bosses, so in 1985, he simply found another mosque at the edge of the desert, and moved there. The place was called Qartu'iyya, and has since become part of Amman. I was dismayed, but made arrangements to go study with him at intervals, saying to myself that it was merely my destiny to continue the path alone. This lasted for about a month, until I saw how much my spiritual state had slackened. It was before my first khalwa with Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, and with the departure of Sheikh Yunus from the neighborhood, it seemed as if its very soul had left.

I soon made arrangements to follow, and spent about a year

with him there. I rented a one-room concrete shack that had been erected fifty yards or so from the mosque to keep straw in for the sheep and goats of the family who built the mosque. There was no water, toilet, or electricity, so I used the outhouse by the mosque, from which I carried a large plastic bucket or two of water each day for my needs.

But it was a joy to work on my translation, and to be with Sheikh Yunus. I served as the mosque's muezzin or crier to prayer, which furnished a pretext to get permission to extend a cable from the mosque to the hut so I could run my tape recorder and my lights at night.

The place had many good-sized desert lizards, who would occasionally drop in through the window aperture, eye me, and then go back out. I had my books set up, my desk made of planks, and the manual typewriter on which I composed the *Reliance*. When a house in the vicinity was burglarized for its jewelry, I became anxious for my books and things, and I asked Sheikh Yunus, "What if they break in here?"

He looked around the room and said, "They'd probably be embarrassed."

Around this time he mentioned to Hajj Kamal the idea of visiting another sheikh of the path, Hajj Mustafa al-Filali, who had been a disciple of Sheikh al-'Alawi, and who had a *zawiya* or Sufi lodge in Zarqa, some fifteen miles distant. I must have shown some interest, for he kept putting it off for one reason or another. He later explained to Hajj Kamal, within my hearing as he sometimes did, that visiting other sheikhs harms a murid, who has little to judge by, and the desire for the new and strange may lead him astray. "He looks at another sheikh, and he says, 'This one has a bigger beard than my sheikh, he must be something . . . .'" So we did not end up visiting Hajj Mustafa in his lifetime.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman once told me of sheikhs who have had several masters in Sufism or been given ijazas in a number of different tariqas, "I have not found them except vacuous (fāḍīn)."

I asked him, "What about Sheikh Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi, didn't he go around to different sheikhs?"

"That was only after his illumination at the hands of his first

sheikh," he said. "After that, one may go around." He did not mention that after that, one has no need to. In a true path, the sheikh is one, the dhikr is one, and the way is one. I already had a sheikh, and two sheikhs were less than one. Sheikh Yunus by subterfuge had likely saved me from a wrong turn.

Those were some of the most satisfying days of my existence, and if they involved some privation, they well illustrated the words of the well-known *qasida* of Abu Madyan

> The savor of life is not
> But the company of the mystics.
> They are the masters,
> The sultans, and the princes.

After a year or so there, probably at the instance of the "Ministry of the Interior," as Sheikh Yunus referred to his wife when speaking to us, he decided to move back to the old neighborhood in Kharabsheh, and I moved back with him.

We went on *umra* (lesser pilgrimage) together several times during these years. The first of them was on the back of a flatbed truck with a canvas canopy over it. Sheikh Yunus drove in front with his mother Umm Yusuf, and I rode in back with Hajj Kamal and 'Abd al-Karim of Hofa. It would only go about forty miles an hour, which gave us a feel for the texture of a desert journey, and the distances travelled by the early Muslims across the Arabian peninsula. In Medina we slept in a parking lot under the sky; in Mecca we slept in the Sacred Mosque.

The many experiences in many places drew me closer to him. I always spoke classical Arabic with him, which sounds something like Shakespearean English might to an ordinary English speaker, and Sheikh Yunus seemed to enjoy the waggishness of it. That was the way he was, a sort of straight man in the comedy of life, a sea of presence that impishly remained behind a facade of ordinariness, occasionally carried to maddening banality to put others off, so that his secret might remain undisturbed.

As the years passed, he occasionally let drop a few words about Sufism in response to my questions. Events had made it difficult in some years to visit Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, and after my first

khalwa in Damascus, I would sometimes ask about doing dhikr, for if Sheikh Yunus knew anything, he knew that. The conversations I had with him were mostly recorded in an unpublished journal, which I quote from here because it is illustrative of those days. I wrote on Sunday 20 September 1992:

> Last May, we were visiting Sheikh Fayez, who had recently had a heart attack. Sheikh Yunus told him of something only one in a hundred thousand people can do: control their thoughts. "A *wali* [saint] once observed," he said, "that for so-and-so many years he had stood guard at the door of his heart, and no thought had entered it without his permission."
>
> Later, when Sheikh Yunus and Hajj Kamal and I were driving north, it came to mind that this could be meant by the definition of the Sufi as "one in entity" (wahid al-dhat), all of his thoughts are headed in the direction he wants to go. I asked Sheikh Yunus about this, saying: "I find that after two hours of dhikr of the Name, concentrating on Allah, my self gets bored and starts looking for her native land, idle thoughts. These creep into the dhikr in the third hour. Doesn't this indicate that a shorter period of time would be more effective?"
>
> "Our sheikh," Sheikh Yunus answered, "used to liken the process to applying a heated iron to wood: you must hold it there to achieve any effect. If you just touch it and lift it off, touch it and lift it off, it won't leave a trace. The final hour of dhikr, in which stray thoughts creep into the Sea of Immensity [absorption in the Absolute]; this is where one's jihad comes in, and this is where the self must be fought and silenced, until the power of the Name reigns supreme in the heart and subjugates all other thoughts to its authority, so that finally it comes to throw out the bad, permit the good, without one consciously directing it."
>
> I asked, "Isn't it enough to be intending and doing good acts while having Allah's good pleasure in mind?"
>
> He said, "Undoubtedly, a person who does this has

achieved a high rank. But he who is immersed while doing this in the sea of the Divine Immensity is higher in station."

"How is this possible in a world of instrumental relations and multiplicity," I wondered, "when 'Allah has never put two hearts in the breast of any one man' [Koran 33:4]?"

He said, "Sheikh al-Hashimi has answered this in his *Ten Answers* to the mufti of Baghdad."

"Yes," I said, "where he says that some of the elect come to actually think and reason through Him, Most Glorious."

"Most Glorious" Yunus echoed, and then fell silent. Hours later, when we were returning at night through the spring-verdant lands of the Bani Hasan between Mafraq and Zarqa, we opened up the car windows and the smell of herbs and grass poured in with the night air. Sheikh Yunus was moved to speak of divine love, which I had never in the previous eight years heard him speak of before. "The smallest breath of it, the faintest trace," he said, "is enough to dissolve and wash away the entire universe with all that is in it: one forgets all of it together" (*Interpreter's Log* [65], 28–30).

What I saw and felt from him, the perfection of his character, and what people realized about him convinced me that he was one of the awliya. My mind was exercised for much of the years I prayed behind him in the mosque with the problem of *wilaya* or sanctity; namely: How much of the wali is human? Ibn 'Ata Illah has said about the enigma of *wilaya* in human existence, of perfection set in imperfection:

> He has veiled the lights of inward souls with the coarseness of outward appearances out of reverence for them; lest they be made low and common by being divulged, or be called on aloud by the tongue of fame (*al-Hikam* [49], 48: 155).

And said:

> The affirmation of sanctity does not entail a negation of being human. Electhood is merely like the rise of the daytime's sun: it appears on the horizon without being part of it. Sometimes the suns of His attributes rise upon the night

of your being. And sometimes He takes that from you and returns you to your own bounds. For daylight is not from you to yourself; but rather it comes over you (ibid., 66: 249).

This seems to say that whoever sees *wilaya* through Allah understands it, while whoever sees it through the particular wali is veiled by it. In a bookshop in Yemen, I found a book by Sha'rani that shed light on this mysterious interpenetration of sanctity and humanity. The author had a vision in which he was told that all men are created of the same original clay of which Adam was formed. All potential human traits, whether physical, such as scents or tastes, heaviness or lightness, beauty or ugliness; or whether ethical, such as faith or hypocrisy, greed or contentment, arrogance or humility—are all homogenously mixed in the primordial clay of which every person is made. Then Allah purified the human nature of the prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace) from bad traits. Regarding all others, including the awliya, Sha'rani continues:

And other than the prophets and the prophetic messengers, all other people remain in accordance with their original clay. What is innate in the original creation is of the natural disposition (fitra) that Allah has created people upon. Of mankind however, is the person whom Allah has shown loving-kindness, using him only in praiseworthy attributes, and making inoperative in him the blameworthy ones, until such a person supposes they have left him altogether. Thus he may say, "We mortified our egos until those attributes in us transformed," while it is not as he supposes, that they have left him altogether. Rather they remain concealed in him. As long as the divine concern ('inaya) applies itself to such a servant, he is protected from sins and vices, not divinely made infallible (ma'sum). And whenever the *'inaya*, the divine concern, is withdrawn from such a servant, the blameworthy traits become active and the praiseworthy ones inactive. We have but said that such a servant is not called *ma'sum*, divinely made infallible, because divinely given infallibility pertains to the prophets alone (*al-Durar al-manthura* [92], 61).

This is what necessitates taqwa from the wali as from everyone else. As Allah tells us, "None feels safe from the guile of Allah but a people who are ruined" (Koran 7:99), and Yahya ibn Mu'adh warned, "A man's fall from a spiritual rank consists in his claiming he has it." Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq, the sheikh of Imam al-Qushayri, explained *wilaya* by saying: "Remembrance (dhikr) is the proclamation of sainthood (wilaya). So whoever is given success to make remembrance has been given the proclamation, and whoever the remembrance is taken from has been stripped." I became convinced that the perfection of the wali was the perfection of the light of the remembrance of Allah in him.

Sheikh Yunus's unfailing recommendation to me, based on his own experience, was to consolidate the meanings of the first khalwa by following it up for a space of years with a nightly wird of three to four hours of remembrance of the Supreme Name. "The minimum as far as I am concerned is four hours," he once said. This was not easy, and he had apparently taken it from Sheikh al-Kurdi, who used to wrap himself in a fleece-lined robe, sit back against the wall, and make dhikr all night, to fall asleep only when occasionally overcome, and then awaken and continue. Sheikh Yunus too would sometimes spend the entire night in invocation, though more frequently before I knew him.

It became clear to me over the months and years that Sheikh Yunus had reached a perpetual state of remembrance of Allah, awake or asleep. He considered this the aim of the way, and said so, and that the percentage of one's time in the state of remembrance was not unlike test scores at school: 90 percent was good, 70 was medium, and 50 or below was failure.

I have since come to think that possessors of *ma'rifa* or gnosis, those who experience the Divine, are on three broad planes. These are not ranks, which would be relative positions on a single scale, but divine *tajalliyyat* or 'manifestations' that often alternate in one and the same individual, modes of knowing as beyond number, magnitude, and limit as what they open onto. One is the plane of indomitable love, as for example Ibn al-Farid had for the Beloved, the occasional experience of rebuff and absence heightening the poignance of the tryst. This gnosis is well cele-

brated in Sufi poetry. Another is the experience of the Divine Presence as it were at a far paradisical remove from this world. I felt that Sheikh Yunus may have been of this category, as it explained a number of things, such as his secretiveness, his utter lack of attachment, almost disdain, towards anything less than that Presence. A third is the plane of those who behold every manifestation in the physical or spiritual world *through* the Divine, such that everything is revelatory of the Presence, at no remove from it whatsoever; and this I believe to have been the state of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, Sheikh al-'Alawi, Ibn al-'Arabi, and others. These are not quantitative "ranks of sainthood," for *ma'rifa* is rather a *qualitative* relationship of Allah with His awliya, as unique to each as to every individual object of His creation; but also because the *significance* in this world or the next of any spiritual experience returns solely to the *rida* or good pleasure of the Divine in it, rather than anything human.

The differences between the awliya are attested to by a great many things, among them Sheikh Yunus once telling me towards the end of our years together that a person should make dhikr with his eyes closed, saying, "Sheikh al-Hashimi used to close his eyes." Yet Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was later to mention to us that for the *dhakir* or 'remembrancer' with presence, there was little difference between opening or closing them. "Wheresoever you turn, there is the countenance of Allah; verily Allah is all-encompassing, all-knowing" (Koran 2:115).

During Sheikh al-Kurdi's lifetime, Sheikh Yunus had spent two of his five years under him in close contact, and had written much of what the sheikh said. The impression I had from his description was that this record had been copious. He had burnt it after the sheikh's death because he felt, in his words, "I might die, and the words of the sheikh fall into the wrong hands and be misunderstood." I regretted this as overcautious and a loss of much that might have otherwise proved valuable and interesting. But in time I realized that Sheikh Yunus's very success in the invocation of the Supreme Name had freed him from needing virtually anything else in the path, in this case even recording the *mudhakara* or spoken words of his sheikh.

Books on Sufism, which I venerated, he regarded as entirely superfluous to the path, little more than a liability which exposed it to the attacks of Wahhabis. Perhaps his study at the University of Jordan's shari'a college had had something to do with this. "Were all the [Sufi] books burned tomorrow," he once said, "it would not diminish the path in the slightest." Indeed, his whole teaching in Sufism could be summarized in a single word: "Invoke."

He had worked with Sheikh al-Kurdi correcting the proofs of *Sharh Hizb al-Bahr* [Commentary upon (Abul Hasan al-Shadhili's) Litany of the Sea] by Ahmad Zarruq, and he told me that his sheikh even used to invoke the Name while engaged in writing and revising. "He did not have any other spiritual rigor (mujahada) besides dhikr of the Name," he said. When I told Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil this, he remarked, "Dhikr *is* sufficient, provided it is accompanied by abandoning disobedience."

His manners towards Allah had been extremely refined by the dhikr. He was a master of guarding his tongue from anything unbecoming or unpleasant. Over the years, I became aware of his remarkable repertoire of *tawriya* or 'giving a misleading impression': words that are meant in one sense but understood in another, and by which even with the most difficult people one can avoid both lying and unnecessary conflict. When listening to someone he completely disagreed with, but who wanted him to confirm their words, he might comment, "Sound words indeed (Kalam salim)"—meaning grammatically. Or if they asserted something patently untrue, he might say, "I'm with you (Ana ma'aka)," meaning physically. Or of the utterly preposterous, he might say, "Allah akbar (Allah is ever greatest)!"—which was true regardless. Or if they pressed him for some future commitment, he might say, "Allah willing, good will come of it (In sha' Allah, yahsulu l-khayr)," which bound him to nothing. He would generally let people say what they wanted, then do what he wanted.

He could nevertheless be decisive when he had to. One day some relatives gave Sheikh Yunus their old television set. Some of his family members were enthused with this touchstone of culture and progress, and he soon had a virtual revolution on his

hands. Sheikh Fayez once told me that Sheikh al-Kurdi had said: "Whoever gets a radio has brought a *fasiq* (godless person) into his house; and whoever gets a television has brought a kafir into his house." The sheikh later made some allowance for news and religious broadcasts on the radio, though never for television. Quitting both smoking and television were the first prerequisites of his path, and none of his disciples had anything to do with them.

Sheikh Yunus did not care for confrontation and argument within his house, and one day while he was carrying the television, it slipped from his hands and fell on the concrete floor with a crash. When he picked it up, the same thing somehow happened a second time. Attempts were subsequently made to revive it, but it never worked again.

Few people cared less about worldly possessions. When I first knew him, he often praised Alusi's fifteen-volume Koranic exegesis *Ruh al-Bayan*. I eventually gave him my copy as a gift, only to watch it gather dust in an unused pile on an old table to one side of the guest room for a few months, after which he gave it away to one of the ulema of the Irbid area for whom he had no special regard. It was as though the immensity of the Divine had so broken his heart that nothing else could be put into it without flowing out. This *zuhd* or 'nonattachment' of his applied to just about everything to which a human being may be attached. For years he would volunteer to burn the voluminous mass of wastepaper with sacred words written on it from my translation work. It meant little to him that he was the teacher and I the student.

Perhaps from his bedouin background, he was a free spirit who disliked routine and habit. This occasionally worked against him. One night, flying in the face of convention, he simply went outside and laid down on the ground and slept. When he woke up, he was in agony from a slipped disc in his neck. He finally found an Arab folk doctor specializing in such cases, who laid him down, applied a sudden pressure, and with a loud snapping sound, ended the problem. He took a lesson after this about a devil-may-care attitude towards causes and effects, remarking, "Whoever mocks things, things mock him."

His utter distaste for religious prestige in the eyes of other people made him an even more thorough *Malamati* or 'follower of the way of blame' than Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil. He hated any hint of praise from real or attempted disciples, and his way was ever "If nominated I will not run; if elected, I will not serve." Whoever tried to make him their sheikh got extremely tired.

One of those who considered him a wali had retired from the air force, and came down from the north to get the benefit of someone with mystic insight as to what profession he might now follow.

"Well actually," said Sheikh Yunus, "I've noticed that these people sometimes wear suits and everything, look very well appointed, who collect the excess rubbish that people leave in the streets . . . ." And he went on for a space extolling the vocation of being a garbageman. Though Sheikh Yunus said it so utterly sincerely and politely, I don't remember that the person ever asked for career advice a second time—which was the point, I eventually realized.

Several Malaysian boys studying shari'a in Amman in the 1980s started reading Ghazali's *Minhaj al-'abidin* [The way of the devotees] with Sheikh Yunus. They communicated to Ustadh Ash'ari Muhammad, leader of their Dar al-Arqam faith movement in Malaysia, their excitement at finding a truly saintly teacher. In time, some of the leadership of Dar al-Arqam came to try to interest Sheikh Yunus in teaching at their center in Malaysia.

"How much can you pay me?" he wondered. When they named a figure, he said, "That's not nearly enough. You have to realize that I actually need a lot of money . . ." and he expanded on his love of money, until they began looking at each other meaningfully, got up, and left.

Another visitor convinced of Sheikh Yunus's rank came and sat down one day, and was regaled by him with the story about the time he went to the dentist but became so intimidated by the fear of the drill and the pain that when the dentist turned his back, he took off the napkin, crept down from the chair, and fled.

A particularly persistent brother came and wanted to be a

disciple. When Sheikh Yunus could not get rid of him by ordinary means, he had him dig a series of great pits in the ground, each of which he had him fill in as soon as they were dug. The brother eventually got the gist.

I saw others over the years, and each had his particular remedy. To those of perpetual fasting, he recounted his most delicious meals and favorite recipes. To those of *zuhd*, asceticism, he wondered aloud how he might compel the jinn to search for him for buried treasure. With those athirst for spiritual profundities, he talked about raising sheep and goats. He seemed to stop at nothing.

Some years before, a book of handwriting analysis had reached me, written by an Eastern European of the Psychoanalytic School, which premised that one's handwriting showed, by its variation from the norm, one's unconscious self-image. Whatever the accuracy of such theories, I did notice when Sheikh Yunus signed in witness an ijaza for the *Reliance* from Sheikh Nuh al-Qudah, that he crossed out the signature with a fence of horizontal strokes for the name to remain behind.

I was once standing in front of the bookcase in his guestroom, where he slept on one of the sitting pallets at night, and I noticed the alarm clock on the shelf was set at two. I wondered aloud why anyone would want to get up that late in the afternoon. Then it dawned on me that it was to get up in the morning. I looked at Sheikh Yunus and he looked at me, reddening with embarrassment.

Another time I had been looking through a small booklet of his, and noticed someone had penciled in a handwritten table of contents on the last page. I said, "Who could have done this?" and he said, "I did." Then he looked confused, looked down, and finally said, "The self refuses to say anything but 'I'."

It was also his way to use gentle hints and irony to puncture pretension, wherever it might raise its head. One of his in-laws was once sitting with us in the imam's quarters by the mosque in Qartu'iyya when we were out there. Not many people came to visit us during that period, but the visitor lived not too far away. He was a greengrocer with a small shop, though he told us that as

a young man, he had gotten hold of a book that contained the secret of how to subjugate all the jinn in the world to one's command. It was one of those do-it-yourself books of which Sheikh al-Kurdi used to say, "Their [real] title is: *Read, and exult: Try, and weep.*"

It said that whoever wanted mastery over the jinn was to remain in a place where he could not see the light of day for forty days, during which there were special dhikrs he had to perform. Our guest had girded his loins, gone down into the cellar, and given instructions to his wife to put food and drink outside the door for him at times when there was no light.

Nothing happened beyond the prescribed routine for thirty-five days. Then, on the night of the thirty-sixth day, the jinn poured in upon him with all their legions. There were horrifying apparitions, some with multiple eyes on the back of their heads, others with necks nine meters tall, others ghastly beyond descriptive word. All the horrors coalesced into one final ultimate horror, in which he found himself lying on his back, with a huge rock as big as the universe suspended directly above his face by a single hair. At this point he had gone completely mad, and bolted screaming from the cellar. In the months afterwards, they had finally found a sheikh to read over him, and with the passage of time, his sanity had returned.

He shook his head as he remembered the folly of youth. Then, seeming to save face, he broadly hinted that he still retained powers over the jinn that others did not have. We fell silent for a moment.

Sheikh Yunus innocently enquired, "How much are tomatoes this week?"

He was at the same time gracious and unstinting with his time and help, and he did his utmost to make my fiqh translation a reality. As previously mentioned, he invited me with his other guests to eat with him on Friday afternoons, and always had me come along on the inevitable excursions afterwards to the mountains or desert in Hajj Kamal's pickup. Sometimes he would delight in showing me the overpreciseness of my ways.

He once slaughtered a sheep, perhaps at Eid, and served it to

us outside the house at Qartu'iyya in clean china dishes, which he set out directly on the ground. All my past upbringing and habits had taught me that the brown dirt and rocks staring up from between the dishes was what should be kept as far from food as possible. It was, in a word, dirty. It was all I could do to stretch my hand towards the fried pieces of meat and organs and eat them. I had not realized how conditioned I was before that meal, which, it came to me afterwards, was probably Sheikh Yunus's point, for he only served it that way once.

Too, when we went on our Friday drives and the time came to pray the midafternoon ('asr) or sunset (maghrib) prayer in the desert, the mountains, or some other open place, he would simply have Hajj Kamal pull over, and we would get out and pray by the truck, prostrating our foreheads on the bare earth. These were some of the most moving prayers I can remember, deeply expressive of the realities the prayer contains.

I had spoken to Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman about the need for a sheikh in Jordan, and mentioned Sheikh Yunus to him at various times, as had Sheikh 'Adel, and in 1988 Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman gave Sheikh Yunus a verbal ijaza as a sheikh in the path, which I recorded on my tape recorder in Damascus. This was followed two years later by a written one. But as the years passed, it became plain that Sheikh Yunus simply could not bring himself to sit in front of students and say anything about Sufism. His way was a private matter, and when Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman saw that Sheikh Yunus intended to do entirely without teaching sessions, the public dhikr (hadra), books of Sufism, and mystical poetry, all of which were prominent features of our path, he designated someone else to carry forward the tariqa in Jordan.

In fall of 1990, the events leading up to the first Gulf War came, and from every Friday pulpit, one heard of nothing but the struggle between the "Army of Iman (true faith)," meaning Baathist Iraq; the "Army of *Kufr* (unbelief)," meaning America; and the "Army of *Nifaq* (hypocrisy)," meaning Saudi Arabia. Almost all the Jordanian ulema and preachers joined in the incendiary harangues for the new Saladin of our times, Saddam Hussein, and some people even named their newborn sons after him.

The religious discourse gave me many reflections about the power of media, and the effect of conventional means of news information—local newspapers, radio, and television—upon the fatwas of ulema regarding political events, for in every Arab country, the ulema followed the line of their government. I felt this was not because they had all sold out, but because their knowledge of key issues was drawn from the media sources most familiar to them—invariably those produced for local consumption.

To my surprise, three Jordanian religious figures were not swept along with the tide: Sheikh Hasan al-Saqqaf, who promptly found himself without a single student; Sheikh Nuh al-Qudah, my fiqh teacher, who had been in the army long enough to know how "Islamic" the political system in Iraq really was; and Sheikh Yunus.

I don't know how Sheikh Yunus knew, but he could not bring himself to give the sermons he was supposed to for the "Army of Iman." I have often thought it might have been *kashf* or preternatural disclosure. In any case I held my peace, knowing that the neighborhood mosque-goers would have run Sheikh Yunus out on a rail if they had found out his real opinions, and both he and I could only hunker down before the storm. The country had been ignited. I stood with him one afternoon outside his door below the mosque, and he looked at me distraughtly. "What am I supposed to do?" he said.

"I don't know," I replied. "I don't know what I would do."

A few days later, he went down to the Ministry of Religious Endowments and submitted his resignation, and they sent someone else to give the sermons. Sheikh Yunus continued to live in his quarters for a space of months while he built a basic cement house out in his clan's native lands to the east of town. By the time he finished, the war had ended and things gotten back to normal, but he maintained his resignation from being the imam, and his determination not to give any more sermons.

As for the tariqa, we had so much hope in him, and were all disappointed and hurt, including myself, that he did not take it up. In the end, Sheikh Yunus had sat in the *zawiya* in Irbid and addressed the assembled brethren: "I have been dressed in the

cloak of a sheikh of the tariqa. In front of you all, I now take it off and put it aside," and he made motions of doffing a cloak and letting it fall.

The day came when he moved back with his family to their ancestral lands. His mother Umm Yusuf could not have been more delighted. There was no electricity, and water had to be hauled in by truck to fill the tanks on the roof every week or two, but the view over the endless desert, the stillness except for the sound of the wind upon the house, the open sky uncluttered with apartments, all made it the apple of her eye. "It's a *sea*," she said with glowing eyes.

At first I blamed him for not carrying out the wishes of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, and resolved to have nothing further to do with him. But later I realized how much he had done for me, and I excused him for putting us off, because that, after all, was the nature Allah had endowed him with. My love for him endures because it was, I hope, for Allah in the first place.

When I reflected on the effect of his company upon me during those years, I found many things. I had come to understand how Islamic character could be lived in real life, how a Muslim should show others generosity, politeness, easygoingness, and patience. I inherited from him a preference for the simple, a conviction that happiness was something that only Allah could create in the heart, and above all, a reverence for the dhikr. Though I never approached him in asceticism, I had seen what it meant, and found he had given me a sense of the vanity of this world, and a distaste for airs.

Today, I remain where I first moved to be near him. There are now many individuals and families in the neighborhood who try to remember Allah and live religious lives, which I attribute to the *baraka* (blessedness) of Sheikh Yunus that imbues it. However unfamiliar as an idea, it is palpable. Typically, he has never returned to visit even once. I go to visit him on Eids, and sit with him for a spell and talk about the old days if I find him at home.

We did meet a while ago. The most senior of the Sufis of Bani Hasan, Hajj 'Abdullah, had died in 'Awajan, and I went to the funeral with Sheikh 'Adel's son Muhammad. We saw Sheikh

Yunus afterwards outside the mosque, and asked him to come with us in the car to ride down to the graveyard for the burial.

"I don't know 'Awajan," I said. "Can you show us how to get to the burial?" He had lived there for a while as imam of the mosque.

He got in and when we started driving said, "Let's go down this street," with an assurance that surprised me. "Now turn here . . ." and soon we were completely lost. We finally came to the edge of a high hill, and saw the graveyard down below us, but it could only be reached by retracing our path, and picking our way through the same maze of streets. Sheikh Yunus again had us turn here, try there, go back along this street, and we became thoroughly confused a second time.

Eventually we got down to the graveyard entrance and piled out of the car in the noonday sun. Bani Hasan had a great regard for Sheikh Yunus, and no one else would have given the supplication for Hajj 'Abdullah at the grave, but we had come late, and someone else from the family had had to do it.

Afterwards, we dropped him off back at his house some miles to the south, and bade him farewell. As we wound our way back to town, Muhammad asked me, "Did you ever see any miracles (karamat) from Sheikh Yunus?"

I thought for a moment, and said, "Miracles of *akhlaq* (character)."

It was not until after we had returned to town that I realized Sheikh Yunus had gotten lost on purpose, to avoid making a public supplication in front of people who revered him. I thought of the words of Junayd's student Ibn 'Ata': "The marks of the wali are four: keeping his secret between him and Allah; protecting his limbs in what is between him and His command; putting up with vexation between him and His creatures; and putting His creatures at ease as befits their disparate intelligences."

It was vintage Sheikh Yunus.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FRIEND

I FIRST met Sheikh 'Adel at Sheikh Yunus's house in 1983, and in the acquaintance that followed, I learned much from him about his life in the tariqa. He reminded me of the words of Junayd "Belief in this way of ours is itself *wilaya* (sainthood)"—that is, because whoever truly believes in it does the works of those who attain *wilaya*. He was a *dhakir* whose heart reflected the reality of the divine word "Verily through the remembrance of Allah are hearts made serene" (Koran 13:28). I heard more from him than anyone else about the teachings of Sheikh al-Kurdi, from whom he took the way.

He had been in the Jordanian Army in the 1960s with Sheikh Fayez, Abu Ridwan, Hajj Muhsin, Hajj 'Azmi, and others who became principal disciples of Sheikh al-Kurdi—indeed there were so many that their artillery unit was nicknamed "Kurdi's Squadron."

They were stationed on the heights near Salt, to the west and a little north of Amman, facing Israel. They used to slip off during their leaves from duty to visit Sheikh al-Kurdi in the Irbid refugee camp to the north, where he had his zawiya before he moved out to the village of Sarih.

All his life, Sheikh 'Adel was one of those naturally inclined to spiritual things and given to religious experiences. In the army, the country around them was high and the air good, they had time between their duties, and each unit had its own mosque and an imam to lead prayers and give lessons. As the time passed

there, an impression came over Sheikh 'Adel that created things were repeating the name "Allah" to him.

He also found that his tentmate Hajj Muhsin would sometimes slip away in the middle of the night, not to reappear until much later. Following him one night, he found that he had been going outside to repeat "Allah" into the night, drawing out the last syllable. It was the same dhikr he had heard from created things. When he pressed him about it, Hajj Muhsin had said that he had taken it from Sheikh al-Kurdi in Irbid, and finally suggested that Sheikh 'Adel come with him to see him.

On the way, Sheikh 'Adel continued to hear things invoking the Name; nor did they cease until he came into the presence of Sheikh al-Kurdi. The sheikh had looked at him, gestured at phenomenal reality, then pointed to Sheikh 'Adel's heart, making mention of the Name to him, as if to indicate that that was where the dhikr would someday come to rest. Sheikh 'Adel had taken the tariqa from him that day, in 1964.

The tariqa had spread among the soldiers as it spreads among others. As Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman once explained to us, "The 'politics' of Sufis are that someone takes the tariqa, benefits from it, and then others notice him, ask him where the benefit came from, come and see, and end up taking the tariqa."

Sheikh al-Kurdi would have new murids invoke the Name sixty-six times and recite the other daily wirds of the way; then with time, they would individually ask the sheikh, and he would increase them to a half an hour, then to an hour. Eventually, if they persevered and became strong in their wirds, he would "put them in the hospital," as he expressed it, meaning the khalwa.

Sheikh 'Adel, like Sheikh Yunus, had been born in Jordan in 1944, but twenty miles north of Amman in Jerash, the ancient city of Gerasa, built by the Romans as one of the ten cities of the Decapolis in 63 B.C. In our times it was a small town filled with Roman ruins, olives, grapes, figs, citrus fruits, and some herds of goats and sheep. His own family had hailed from Gaza some generations before, and had passed down, father to son, the trade of making cheese and dairy products, which Sheikh 'Adel was also to make his living at.

He was stout of build, fairly tall, broad of face, with high cheeks and purposeful eyebrows set over remarkable sapient eyes. He wore his beard wide and full. He was a handsome man who dressed well, usually in a white Arab headcloth held in place with the two traditional wrapped black cords atop, with a tailored suitcoat that came to his knees worn over a matching *jallabiyya* (shift), or over a shirt tucked into a belt and trousers. He wore dress socks and shoes, seldom sandals. In the more than a decade since Sheikh al-Kurdi had died, he had thus somewhat departed from the familiar dress the sheikh had encouraged his disciples to wear: a white turban of a few wraps worn under a white headcloth without the black headbands, but rather tied loosely around the neck in back, or tucked down the collar of an ordinary mid-length men's suitcoat, which they wore over a matching *jallabiyya*. Like Sheikh Yunus, Sheikh 'Adel had ceased to gather with the group that had formed around the new sheikh, and like him also had gone back to clothes that were closer to those worn by ordinary religious people of his own background.

He moved and spoke with deliberation, emphasizing important points by looking his listener in the eye. Though he had similar mystical aptitudes and the same sheikh as Sheikh Yunus, he was in many ways the complete opposite in temperament: open, unguarded, and outgoing in social relations, living his life with *savoir faire*. He spoke freely and without affectation of his Sufism, Allah having manifested in him the divine word "And as for the blessings of your Lord, declare them" (Koran 93:11).

He had been briefly involved in his youth in the prohibited Hizb al-Tahrir party, a relationship that ended when they wanted to bomb the house of a political opponent. "Here was a Muslim man who prayed," Sheikh 'Adel remembered, "with five Muslim daughters who wore the hijab—and we were supposed to blow them up. For what? For disagreeing with the party. I told them to forget it." He also used to mention that their *'aqida* or creed of faith was that of the heterodox, ultra-rationalist Mu'tazilite sect of early Islam. "They think that creation is in one sphere, and Allah in another sphere completely apart!" he once

exclaimed. His experience taught him, as he put it, that "a party hack is of no use except to the party."

When he first took the tariqa, Sheikh al-Kurdi had given him the dhikr of the Supreme Name that he gave to others in the same unit. But then Sheikh 'Adel had been transferred to another unit in 'Aqaba, far to the south. One thing led to another, and he had gotten away from keeping up with his dhikr and finally fallen away from the tariqa altogether.

One day he found himself rejoined by Sheikh Fayez in the new unit, they got to talking, and Sheikh Fayez told him he should return and take the path again from the sheikh. Sheikh 'Adel felt too ashamed, and commissioned him to go talk to the sheikh on his behalf and ask him if he could possibly accept him back again.

Sheikh al-Kurdi told Sheikh Fayez that of course he would take him back. "For me to lose all my children," he said, "would be less to me than to lose a single part of one finger of a disciple of mine. If you have a dinar of pure gold, and it falls into the mud, and you pick it up and wash it off, what do you have?"

"A dinar of pure gold," said Sheikh Fayez.

"That's what the brethren are," said the sheikh. So Sheikh 'Adel had repented and come back, and when he married, he built a house in Sarih to be next to the sheikh, whom he served till his death in 1972.

Sheikh al-Kurdi had taught his students Mallibari's *Irshad al-'ibad*, which comprised Shafi'i jurisprudence, tenets of faith, and spiritual practice; and Sheikh 'Adel had studied other works of fiqh with Sheikh Barakat, the mufti of Irbid. Like his sheikh, Sheikh 'Adel considered correct Islamic 'aqida or tenets of faith the *sine qua non* of spiritual realization, and he would sometimes inquire when talking to people, "Do we know what 'aqida we are going to die and meet Allah upon?" He said to me more than once, "Allah never takes an ignorant person as a wali, unless He teaches him Sacred Knowledge."

He entered the khalwa under the sheikh and spent long years thereafter in the service of the Supreme Name. He had spent nights in dhikr, and told me that sometimes when he found him-

self sleepy, he would fix a needle so its point protruded slightly from his hand, so that when he nodded off his hand would relax, and the needle would prick his thigh and wake him up.

He became filled with presence from the dhikr. He also loved *mudhakara* (Sufi instruction), and when he spoke of *haqa'iq* (pl. of *haqiqa*), the higher Realities of the Divine context that allow phenomenal being to arise as such, one could feel them. It is said that just as a wali can save a disciple with a single word, so too an ignorant Sufi can destroy one with a single word. But Sheikh 'Adel was not ignorant. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said of the few companions one finds in this world who actually benefit one, "People are like camels: out of a hundred, you can hardly find one fit to travel upon" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.130: 6498. s). Sheikh 'Adel was a traveller.

He loved the hadra, and was generally of the *nuqaba* or those who paced the tempo for the rest within the circle of dervishes making dhikr. The mystical *qasida*s spoke his language, and constituted much of his own personal *mudhakara*. He once exclaimed: "Here is the sheikh, the wali, the gnostic, who struggled in the path for forty years to reach a realization; then distilled its essence into two or three lines of poetry and said: 'Whoever wants what I have, just come and take it.'" He extended his hand with two fingers and thumb together as if offering a morsel to a guest and saying: "Have it."

He spoke entirely without constraint about the arcana of Sufi *mudhakara* when in the company of those he felt they pertained to. As Ibn 'Ajiba says:

> This was the way of Junayd (Allah be well pleased with him): he used to divulge ultimate Realities (haqa'iq) before a throng of people. When objections were raised, he said, "This knowledge is protected from anyone taking it except those to whom it belongs" (*Iqadh al-himam* [47], 2.79).

Sheikh 'Adel told me that Sheikh al-Kurdi too would give lessons over the loudspeaker at the mosque from books beyond the capacity of ordinary people to understand, saying, "This knowledge guards itself."

He took this from his sheikh, and also believed that when two people with knowledge of higher Realities sit together and talk about them, the *hal* or state of each increases exponentially, compounded by the *hal* of the other. This is of course when Allah alone is what is sought, unadmixed by other motive, as He says, "And when My servants ask you of Me, verily I am near" (Koran 2:186). "Colloquy is of the Presence," Sheikh 'Adel used to say. Such use of *mudhakara* certainly played a more prominent role in the method of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, who would sit with us into the night singing and expounding mystical poetry, than in, say, the method of Sheikh Yunus.

Yet the "devotional way" of intensive dhikr may have been a providential dispensation for the rural background of many of Sheikh al-Kurdi's murids in Jordan. Those of Hashimi's circle in Damascus had been steeped in the *mudhakara;* the ontology of the Divine Being as the necessary condition for the very appearance of the world and all its contents—physical, intelligible, or spiritual—was taken for granted by them. A small nudge by the dhikr, a metaphysical *qasida* here, a lesson there, and this Presence congealed into an experiential Reality (haqiqa) from which all other phenomena manifestly derived. It seems possible that the way of intensive dhikr which Sheikh al-Kurdi encouraged by precept and example produced better results in Jordan because ontology itself was less familiar to many there, and the way of *mudhakara* hence less telling.

Both Sheikh 'Adel and I found the plowing of the land of our hearts with dhikr between our first and second khalwas beneficial. The *tahqiq al-fana* or 'realization of one's ephemerality,' which the dhikr was a means to, readied the land for the downpour of meanings that came with the second khalwa. Yet the Presence that coalesced in the hearts and remained there came from the *mudhakara* of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman. The Sufi teaching over the years by which he imparted his *hal* or state proved more lasting than any other factor, and that state was ultimately what passed into and filled the hearts, "and valleys flowed to their capacity" (Koran 13:17).

Yet neither dhikr nor *mudhakara* was sought for its own sake,

but only for what it could open the heart to, as Sheikh al-'Alawi says:

> Dhikr was sought from the disciple before entering upon Allah and being in His company, indeed, it is an ascent in *tawhid* (unicity). But only during his journey to Allah, not when he is sitting with Him. Otherwise, how should someone who has found the Named turn his attention to the Name? The end of remembrance (dhikr) is seeing the Remembered. At times of heedlessness and being unaware—He Most Majestic has made it [dhikr] conditional upon when one forgets, not when one is conscious, saying, "Remember your Lord when you forget" [Koran 18:24], meaning, "When you forget Him and have lost sight of Him, then remember Him, that He may return you to how you were." So His Name is not recited except when the door is closed and the veil is lowered. Whenever the door is opened, feel bliss in the Presence and be oblivious to the remembrance through the sight of the Remembered. Otherwise, you will be expelled from whence you least expect it. O you who know Allah, do not occupy yourself with other than Him—for everything that is other than Him alters one's moments with Allah—lest you should cease beholding Him and sufficing yourself thereby from merely repeating His Name. Would any sane person keep repeating the Name of the King while looking at Him? A name but *signifies* the named, and is used for the absent. When the Named is present, it suffices in place of the Name. So he who knows the Entity will not turn to either the Names or Attributes, nor accept hearing of the mention of Allah from another, let alone from himself, because of the appearance of the Manifest (al-Dhahir) that has come to him (*al-Minah al-quddusiyya* [3], 163–64).

So the difference in emphasis between dhikr and *mudhakara*—indeed in the *ma'rifa* (experience of the Divine) itself of different sheikhs and the methods by which they attain and consolidate it—is of Allah's providence for murids, since a sheikh can only

impart what he knows by having done it. Sheikh 'Adel was a felicitous combination of both approaches, dhikr and *mudhakara*, and in this I felt that he had imbibed the state of his sheikh. In any event, he certainly had something to convey from the years he served him.

Sheikh 'Adel sometimes talked about subtle barriers to the Sufi work that his sheikh had pointed out to him. A disciple will often take for granted that he knows the causes and effects of everything in his spiritual life, whereas the insight of the sheikh discloses other causes unapparent to him.

There is, for example, complete unanimity among the sheikhs that if one's 'aqida is bent, the final illumination will never arrive, no matter how many "spiritual techniques" one has mastered or how many hours one spends at them. For one is standing at the door of a King, not before a collection of causes and effects. This is why Abul Hasan al-Shadhili used to say:

> Every single preference of Sacred Law, and all its priorities, you have nothing whatsoever to do with. Hear and obey. And this is the sphere of godly fiqh and divinely given knowledge, and is the ground upon which there rains down the knowledge of ultimate Reality ('ilm al-haqiqa) taken from Allah by him who is truly ripe (*al-Tanwir* [50], 16).

In later years I would notice that intellectual pride was perhaps the commonest reason that Western seekers stumble from the path. If Easterners are tempted by worldliness and mammon, Westerners' temptation is through ideas, rejecting established points of the religion of Islam out of pride in their own opinions, airs of cultural superiority, or a sense of self-consequence. Whether they know more than the ulema and sheikhs concerning an agreed-upon interpretation of a Koranic verse, an article of faith, or a point of external practice, intellectual pride is a serpent, and its strike can be fatal to one's *suluk* or spiritual progress.

Sheikh 'Adel told me that one day a man came in and sat in Sheikh al-Kurdi's diwan to speak with him about the tariqa. They talked together, and the man recounted to the sheikh everything on Sufism he knew or had read. He finally got up, shook hands

with the sheikh, and departed completely satisfied. Afterwards the sheikh had turned to Sheikh 'Adel and said: "His sack was full; I couldn't put a single thing into it."

He also told me of a disciple who was in the khalwa for a number of days, but to no effect. Sheikh al-Kurdi kept him in a day longer, but still no change. Longer, and yet nothing. Finally, the reason became plain to the sheikh, and he told him, "You have rancor in your heart for Al al-Bayt, the descendants of the Prophetic House: you will never see any benefit until you repent from it." It was a minor point, perhaps, taken with the whole personality of the murid, but a major point in the eyes of Him whose favor he was seeking. He left the khalwa, came back when he had made a sincere change of heart, and Allah let him succeed on the second attempt.

Another was a farmer whose onions were coming up when he entered his khalwa. He told the sheikh how difficult the dhikr was, for he kept thinking about his onions. The sheikh thought for a moment, then told him, "There is a special dhikr for you. You are to repeat: 'Onions ..., onions ..., onions ...'"; and then he left. The disciple did what he was told, and when at length the sheikh finally reappeared, the disciple was ready to make dhikr of the Name with a heart free of preoccupation, and Allah aided him as He had others. Sheikh 'Adel smiled as he remembered: "He arrived—by onions."

Sheikh 'Adel saw many events with his sheikh, and absorbed much of his teaching and his state. One night he was reciting his wird of the *Wadhifa*, the long and beautiful Shadhili litany of Blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), and he fell fast asleep in the midst of it. A noble sheikh came to him in a dream bearing a deed in his hand. He divided it into two parts and gave Sheikh 'Adel one of them, saying, "Had you recited the entire *Wadhifa*, you would have been given the whole deed." When he awoke, he recounted what had happened to Sheikh al-Kurdi and described the figure. The sheikh said: "That was Sheikh Muhammad al-Hashimi. He helps us educate disciples."

Another time Sheikh 'Adel was at his dhikr on a cold winter

night, and Satan appeared before him. He recalled: "I caught him with both hands and threw him into the heater that was lit there. At this, he let out a great peal of laughter. I told the sheikh about it, and he said, 'By throwing him into the flames, you only returned him to his origin. Had you thrown him into water, he would have been extinguished.'"

One year a drought came which greatly distressed the region, for without rain there would not even be water to drink. The sheikh had gathered his most senior disciples around the mouth of a well, and they had stood there, each supplicating Allah to his utmost. They remained standing there praying until clouds gathered, overspread the sky above, and rain began to fall, turning into a deluge that filled the well, and saved the lands, villages, and towns.

When Sheikh al-Kurdi died, as with other great sheikhs, it was as if the string that held the *misbaha* together broke, and the beads rolled to the far corners of the room. Sheikh 'Adel had been utterly dismayed by the claims and counterclaims in the ensuing contest for leadership. It ultimately repelled all the disciples who had once been closest to the sheikh, among them Sheikh 'Adel.

In truth, such times are a test from Allah, to manifest what His servants may do. For some, the way dies with the death of the sheikh. For others, things the sheikh would never have countenanced slowly creep into their lives as the years grow long, and keep the *tawfiq* or 'success from Allah' from their dhikr and their attempts to perfect themselves. Others continue inexorably with the dhikr, the *mudhakara*, and abandoning their own faults. Sheikh 'Adel was one of these. The memory of Sheikh al-Kurdi, what he had been and what he had attained, remained etched in Sheikh 'Adel's mind and set the pace for the remaining days and years of his life. He was a *salik* or traveller, and in the Sufi journey, he who keeps travelling wins. This was the lesson of the death of one's sheikh.

With Sheikh al-Kurdi's passing, and his own leaving the army three years later, there was little to hold him in the north, so he went home to his native Jerash and invested his savings in a supermarket with some family members. There, in addition to

ordinary groceries, they sold their own dairy products, cheeses, and olives.

He told me that one day the local priest, probably Eastern Orthodox, came in. As they got to speaking, the conversation turned first to theology and then to mysticism. To Sheikh 'Adel's surprise, the priest began speaking about ultimate Realities, and ended by declaring that "all is God."

"All is God?" asked Sheikh 'Adel. "How?"

The priest said: "In reality, we are all God. You are God. I am God."

"You are God?" Sheikh 'Adel asked.

"Essentially, yes."

"Well now, Mr. God," said Sheikh 'Adel with a smile, "I've gotten myself into a number of rather sizable debts. As long as you're here, how about taking care of things?"

The priest got his things together, paid for them, and left the store a bit flustered.

Most of a year went by, when Sheikh 'Adel saw the time had come to take inventory to pay the zakat or 'poor-due' on their stock of merchandise. His family partners refused to hear anything of it, and Sheikh 'Adel could not convince them. What to do? This too was of the testing of Allah, for sometimes in the midst of life one is faced with a hard choice between right and wrong, and whichever one may choose, things are never quite the same again.

Sheikh 'Adel chose to wash his hands of his entire holdings, pay the zakat he personally owed, walk away, and never look back. He didn't want any part of something that debarred the poor of their financial rights. It was a struggle for his young family, but he moved to Amman, where he first ran a hotel with Sheikh Fayez downtown, then opened another grocery store, in which, as before, he marketed his own dairy products, along with his wife's olives, stuffed peppers, and other home manufactures.

When we met at the house of Sheikh Yunus, though Sheikh 'Adel was ten years older than I and spoke a different language, we became fast friends, since we both had the tariqa. We would go places together in his van; sometimes with Sheikh Yunus to

the lessons of Sheikh Nuh al-Qudah at the army base in Zarqa, sometimes other places. On occasion he would take me to the little concrete shack he had built in Arainbeh, past the airport to the south of town. He kept a worker there, who bought sheep milk from the bedouins for Sheikh 'Adel to make and sell as yogurt.

On these drives he would sometimes talk about secrets of the mystic path. What I found characteristic of them, like those of other Sufis I met, was that seldom were they merely about some particular portion of reality, as are ordinary secrets, but rather they generally opened onto the universal, meaning that they disclosed the larger *context* in which particular realities took place, had their being, and ultimately made sense through.

I had wondered, for example, about the *Haqiqa al-Muhammadiyya* or Muhammadan Reality, which had formed a considerable portion of Sheikh al-Kurdi's private *mudhakara*, and was mentioned in some Sufi books, particularly from the Ottoman period. They seemed to say that the spiritual Reality of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace), who was a historical human being created in time, was in some sense coeval with Allah's beginninglessly eternal decision to create the world out of nothing.

"The Muhammadan Reality," Sheikh 'Adel told me one night on the way to Zarqa, "is the Divine Unmanifestness (Butun) become Manifestness (Dhuhur)." He opened his hand with the palm up: "Inward to outward."

It was not an obligatory tenet of faith, but rather of the knowledge that Allah discloses to some individuals of the Umma and not others, who need not know. The story of Moses and Khidr (upon whom be blessings and peace) in the Koran (18:60–82) establishes the possibility of such knowledge. Whatever exception may be taken thereat, Sheikh 'Adel was conscious of the Muhammadan Reality as the teleological cause of the entire cosmos, the effective reason for which all had been created.

To clarify, Allah created the universe for a purpose, a context in which alone it has meaning; namely, as the theophany of His Names and Attributes, that He may be known. He says, "Nor

did I create jinn and mankind except to adore Me" (Koran 51:56), which according to Mujahid, the student of the prophetic Companion Ibn 'Abbas, means "except to *know* Me" (*Tafsir al-Baghawi* [10], 5.230). That is, the entire spectrum of divine names, entailing outcomes from divine favor to divine wrath, corresponds to the entire spectrum of human possibilities, from highest felicity to direst ruin. These fates, in turn, are fully manifest only in the ultimate outcomes of eternal paradise or hell, *eternal* because the individual's *choice* is to continue in his chosen way, could he do so, *forever.*

To say it again, the text of the universe is illegible, and what it may signify unknown, unless one understands who it exists *for:* namely the thinking beings who choose and realize their potentialities through it—"one party in paradise, and one party in the blaze" (Koran 42:7).

These outcomes are governed by a logic that any thinking being can understand, direct his will to, and utilize to his advantage; namely, the revelation and guidance sent by Allah to mankind through the prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and all those between them. Their historical succession—each bearing one single message of monotheism, but providentially different in religious commands and prohibitions—culminated in the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace). "Culminated," first, because his final and comprehensive sacred ethos was not sent to a single people, but to all mankind together: "We have not sent you except to all people entirely" (Koran 34:28); and secondly, because its religious forms superseded those of all previously valid religions, that Allah might make it "paramount over all religion whatsoever" (Koran 9:33).

So the final standard for the human outcomes which manifest the divine names to their fullest extent *is* this ultimate revelation—which was historically manifest in the inspired person and mission of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). This is the *Haqiqa al-Muhammadiyya* or Muhammadan Reality, whose manifestation is, in this specific sense, the "reason" for the whole universe.

I explain it here discursively, first, lest this *Haqiqa* be confused

with a sort of "Islamic demiurge," which it definitely is not, for the Platonic demiurge brings about creation as its effective *cause*, while no one believes that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) created anything. Rather, he is seen here as a *teleological* cause, the *purpose for* Allah's creating the universe. There is a world of difference between these.

Secondly, if explainable in its own terms discursively, this Muhammadan Reality was not mere discourse to Sufis like Sheikh 'Adel, but rather directly experienced as *dhawq* (lit. "taste") or the contents of consciousness itself. This was made plain to me by a conversation Sheikh 'Adel had one day with one of his friends.

They were discussing seeing the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in visions. The friend had not seen the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in a dream, but while awake. He said: "I once saw everything in the universe *through* him (Allah bless him and give him peace). The experience lasted with me for three days, when I finally asked Allah to lift it from me because I was afraid it would become a veil from Allah Himself."

Sheikh 'Adel said: "That was the 'supreme vision' of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). The 'lesser vision' is seeing him in dreams." The Muhammadan Reality was clearly something palpable to them.

The degree to which this Reality is manifest to a particular human being has been called the *Nur al-Muhammadi* (Muhammadan Light). It was emphasized by Sheikh al-Kurdi to his inner circle of disciples with good reason, for the light and significance of this one individual, the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), was axial to their whole moral and mystical quest—for the very good reason that whoever obeyed him entered paradise, and whoever disobeyed him entered the hellfire.

Through their exaltation of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), Sheikh al-Kurdi and his brethren exalted his Sacred Law and the Highest Reality he worshipped—and were in turn exalted by them. Sheikh 'Adel said: "I have looked everywhere for a tariqa stronger in living the Sacred Law outwardly,

or more steeped in the divine Reality inwardly. I have never seen one."

His character reflected this *Nur al-Muhammadi* in many ways. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had said: "The most perfect of believers in faith is the most considerate of them to others. And the best of you all is the most considerate of you to his wife" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 3.20: 1196. S). Few could keep pace with Sheikh 'Adel in chivalrous treatment of his wife. Wherever he travelled, he seldom returned without a special gift he had bought her. He was in love with her, and she bore him eight sons and three daughters. He shared his spiritual life with her and spoke to her about ultimate Realities, which Sheikh al-Kurdi had given him permission to teach to her. All this was in marked contrast to the attitude of many brothers in Jordan, who delegated the tariqa to the men, and the home and family to the women.

Another of the lights in him, like other true Sufis I have met, was his eating from the labor of his own hands. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had said, "No one ever ate better food than from the work of his own hands; and the prophet of Allah, David, used to eat from the work of his own hands" (*Bukhari* [17], 3.74: 2072. S).

"A disciple was once on his way to hajj with his sheikh," Sheikh 'Adel told me, "and by the wayside they saw a dove with a broken wing, that could neither fly nor fend for itself. The murid asked the sheikh, 'How will it live?' The sheikh said nothing, but presently an eagle alighted near the injured bird bearing food, which it gave it to eat. The two men passed onward to hajj, and when they later returned by the same way, they saw the dove was still alive, and the eagle still bringing it food. The disciple said: 'All glorious is He who sustains the weakest of His creatures! The dove has no one to rely on but Allah, and He feeds it. If only we could be like this dove.' The sheikh told him, 'Say rather, "If only we could be like this eagle."'"

Sheikh 'Adel strove to be. Once for a period while I was working on the *Reliance*, my wife and I fell on hard times. Sheikh 'Adel asked if he could do anything to help. I thought for a moment, then told him we needed a number of chickens each month. So

he would buy them at the market, have them slaughtered, plucked, and drawn, and deliver them to our door in his van. When someone asked about this, he said: "When I help someone, I don't help him as I want. I help him as he wants." After his death, I found out that he hadn't had any money either at the time, but had borrowed it to get the chickens. All this spent on his *hal*.

He was a person whose presence in dhikr was felt before one could tell where it was from, and when he spoke, it was from his own realization. One of the things he used to say was "The looking of the gnostic ('arif) at a wall is worship," that is, because he sees it through Allah. Sheikh 'Adel also had tremendous patience for putting up with people, which made him a good father. He would dispassionately view his children's mistakes, point them out, and guide them to the right way. His children grew up decent, respectable people who loved the religion and the spiritual path. He used to say of patience, "A larger vessel can contain a smaller, but not vice versa."

He considered feeding guests a mainstay of the path, and he would quote the words of Sheikh al-Kurdi "Whoever does not have an eye that weeps, a leg that strides, and a house that is a relief to his brothers—relief from him is true relief."

I remember many a good meal at his house, one of them when Abul Qasim Spiker from Cambridge, England, was visiting Amman for a year with his family. Abul Qasim had asked Sheikh 'Adel, "What is Sufism?" and when I translated this to him, he bared his arm to his elbow and said: "You, and your arm"—meaning works.

His own works were prodigious, and he accomplished quite a number of them while going about his other daily tasks. Before sleeping each night, he made a point of remembering death, and reflecting how it would be, and it seems to have given him an urgency that made his works both many and regular. He recited the Supreme Name at night and before dawn. In the morning and evening he recited the *Wird al-'Amm* which connects one with the initiatic chain (silsila) of the tariqa. Like other murids of Sheikh al-Kurdi, he would recite the *Wadhifa* after the dawn

prayer (subh), and recite morning and evening the three suras that the sheikh assigned to everyone: Ya Sin, al-Waqi'a, and Tabarak. He had a personal wird for himself every day of a thousand Blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in a shorter form, though he told me that the longer form contained in the *Wird al-'Amm* was the same as that with which the angels said the Blessings upon him (Allah bless him and give him peace).

Towards the end of his life, he occupied himself with the *Samadiyya*, so termed after the Name of Allah *al-Samad* or the Ultimate. It consisted in reciting 100,000 times Sura al-Ikhlas (Koran 112), which contains that Name. He would keep track of the hundreds with a ten-bead counter attached to his *misbaha* (rosary), and keep track of the thousands by moving a marker one bead at a time along the whole string until he had finished at the hundredth. He would donate the reward of each *Samadiyya* to various members of his family, living and dead. I made a *misbaha* for him out of wheel-shaped wooden beads, which, though hefty to the hand, was short enough to manage at one's daily tasks. It was set off with other colors of beads and tassels and counters, its flamboyance so suited to his personality and taste that it seldom left his hand.

One of the most characteristic scenes I remember of Sheikh 'Adel was when his old artillery-mate Sheikh Fayez was with him. Sheikh Fayez had the wry sort of Palestinian humor which, especially when there was an appreciative audience, as was not infrequent, would hardly let Sheikh 'Adel get in a serious word without making it into a complete farce. They had been rivals this way since early army days.

When we all went on umra together in 1988 with Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, Sheikh Fayez had been in charge of getting the food for the rest of us, perhaps eighteen men. Sheikh 'Adel came into the main kitchen of the rambling old third floor of a hotel we had rented together in Medina near the Prophet's Mosque (Allah bless him and give him peace). "What are you fixing for the sheikh?" he asked Sheikh Fayez.

"Lentils," he replied.

"You're fixing *lentils* for Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman?"

"Well, what am I supposed to fix?"

"You should get some roast chickens."

"Forget it. We've got a budget, I've already bought the lentils, and that's what we're having."

Sheikh 'Adel went down and bought a brace of roast chickens with his own money, and had them back in time to set before the sheikh for dinner. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman however didn't eat any of the chickens, remarking, "Since I left Damascus, I've been wishing for lentils." Sheikh Fayez raised his eyebrows at Sheikh 'Adel and gave him a triumphant smile. That was how they were, always vying in some humorous altercation.

On this trip Sheikh Fayez took to calling Sheikh 'Adel "Ibn Taymiyya," after the Wahhabis' favorite scholar; or alternatively "Ibn Baz," or sometimes "Ibn 'Uthaymin," both principal figures in the vehemently anti-Sufi Saudi religious establishment. Sheikh 'Adel would just smile, look at the rest of us, and point at Sheikh Fayez as if to say, "See how he is?" The last one I heard was a few years ago when one of the sons put up a portrait of Sheikh 'Adel in the family store after his death. Sheikh Fayez walked in with me, looked at it, and asked, "What's Bin Laden doing here?"

After one of the meals in Medina, Sheikh Fayez found himself alone in the kitchen with all the dishes, and everybody out in the main room listening to Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman. The sheikh's servant Abu Munir, along with Sheikh Yunus and me, had been riding with Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman on this umra in the car Hajj Kamal drove, and we were sitting around the sheikh. Sheikh Fayez came out and said to us, "I don't mind if *you* are the awliya, but if all the rest of us are going to be awliya too, how are the dishes supposed to get done?" The sheikh smiled, and a couple of volunteers leapt up and went to the kitchen.

Sheikh 'Adel exalted the ulema of Islam, especially our teacher Sheikh Nuh al-Qudah. He was always interested in any lesson that he could go to with a scholar. He read Sufi books on his own—classics like Tusi's *Luma'* and Ibn 'Abbad al-Rundi's commentary on the *Hikam* of Ibn 'Ata Illah—in his store between customers and his daily wirds. He once composed a *qasida* of

seventy-two stanzas in praise of Allah, His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace), and the awliya.

In the early 1990s he went to Damascus and entered the khalwa under Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman. When he returned he remarked, "He showed me a spiritual state I didn't know existed." It had been more than twenty years since his first khalwa with Sheikh al-Kurdi, and all through them he had worked on himself. I visited him after he got back, and wrote in my journal the next day, Sunday 20 December 1992:

> I asked Sheikh 'Adel if he had benefited from his second khalwa, and he said yes, that he had reached the station beyond "This is you, and this is your Lord." From the little he said, I understood that he had found absence from his own being ...
>
> Sheikh 'Adel thought it better not to speak much of it. I remembered Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman's explanation once to me of the last transformation of the spirit (ruh), that "if it disappears and is annihilated from everything besides the Maker of created things, and then leaves its apperception of itself and of this body and vanishes into the Absolute Presence (Hadra Kulliyya)—it is termed the *sirr* (sirr)." This is perhaps what Sheikh 'Adel has to be silent of (*Interpreter's Log* [65], 125–26).

I always felt that Allah had completed his *tarbiya* at this time, and for the rest of his life, he remained reserved about the secrets of the way, the opposite of how he had previously been, though he once told me of his complete certitude that Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was the Axis (Qutb) of the Age.

He went on a final umra toward the end of his life without any of the brethren, a bus trip with a tour group that signed up all the ordinary Jordanian citizens who had the fare. On his return he said, "I realized on this trip that there are many more awliya among ordinary Muslims than I had ever thought."

In September of 1996, my wife and I were away on a journey to Morocco when Sheikh 'Adel was physically overcome by the complications of diabetes and passed on from this world. He had

been laid to rest in Jerash by the time we returned. Truly, in him, a friend had travelled on, and as Hajj Kamal afterwards remarked, it seemed as if two-thirds of Sufism had died in Jordan.

From my hours and days sitting at his side in the van, eating with him on the floor with the brothers, having him over to the house, travelling with him to Damascus and Medina, I had heard a great deal about the path, its masters, and its dhikr. Sheikh 'Adel had shown me the transmutative power of having awe and respect for something, since by his exaltation of his sheikh and tariqa, he had spent himself utterly in attaining what the awliya had attained, and it had exalted him. His life deeply impressed me with the sacredness of the initiatic chain (silsila), its mysterious power, and the secret of those realized in it. Sheikh 'Adel had also showed me that patience is the sign that Allah wants to give a person success. He had shown me how an *'arif* should be. Seldom do I remember anything he said or did today without some new benefit coming from it. Sheikh al-Kurdi had wept at the end of his life that he had not "given birth" to a murshid from his own students; yet, as Ibn 'Ata Illah said, "sometimes works are accepted that you do not at first notice the fruits of."

I had come to believe that the total knowledge (ma'rifa) of the Divine that permeates body, mind, and soul cannot be reached by the mind's intellect, but only by a transfer of the experience from heart to heart. The medium of this transfer was *wafa*, or deep entire loving *loyalty*. Sheikh 'Adel had learned it from Sheikh al-Kurdi, whose love of his own sheikh was proverbial among the brethren of Damascus in his time. Sheikh 'Adel told me that they used to say of him, "His love of al-Hashimi is insanity"; to the degree that when Sheikh al-Kurdi was sent to Jordan as a murshid in the 1950s, he would not even give a lesson at the times when Sheikh al-Hashimi was giving one in Damascus. If such loyalty is barely comprehensible today, it was the way they were, and they benefited enormously from it.

Sheikh 'Adel's last years had been financially difficult, he had incurred debts, and his death left a large family from whom the center was suddenly gone. In the midst of this desolation, his lifelong comic nemesis Sheikh Fayez stepped in, paid the debts,

directed the steps of the children into honorable professions, and invested his own life savings to keep the family store afloat so it could get back on a profitable footing. He proved fidelity itself to his old foe. In that too, I had a lesson in *tariq*.

If asked to sum up what I had seen in the thirteen years I knew him, I would choose the words of Dhul Nun al-Misri, who once said:

> When Allah honors a servant, He inspires him with His remembrance (dhikr), keeps him faithfully at His door, and draws him into closeness with Himself. He manifests Himself to him with the mightiest of benefits, aids him from Himself with increases, and protects him from the preoccupations of this world and tribulations, so that he becomes of the elect of Allah, and those beloved to Him. What great tidings are his, in life and death! If the sons of this world but knew what they had missed—of the fortune of those brought nigh, the joy of those in remembrance, and the happiness of those in love—they would perish from utter regret (*al-Maknun* [101], 115–16).

I had known a remarkable man, and remember him as he was, rumbling down the road, looking out from beneath his white headcloth, in a van that smelled of canisters of sheep milk in the back—with a heart inside him that was a sky without any horizons. It was the custom of Sufis in Jordan, when a visitor drives away who they hope may return, to give the call to prayer after him; and this I did, asking Allah to reioin us further down the highway.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LAST OTTOMAN

IT WAS getting on towards afternoon when I landed in Istanbul from Jordan to meet my prospective bride and her sheikh. I got into the taxi at Atatürk Airport with some pain from a torn cartilage in my knee. The taxi driver looked, and I pointed at it and said, "*Bozuk*," which brought a smile to his lips, as it meant "out of order." We pulled out of the airport, and I told him, "Zeytinburnu," the name of the neighborhood I had been given. For some reason, he dropped me a whole train station away, and it seemed as if he added a couple zeros to the fare, though one could never be sure with Turkish inflation. It was the dead of winter, and the air was acrid with the smoke of bituminous coal. I made my way through the narrow streets, alleyways, and occasional passageways beside the raised track in the direction that most people pointed when I asked. With little Turkish, a suitcase, and the knee, I wondered if I was going to make it, and said a lot of prayers. After a long space of walking and resting, I met someone who knew where Hajji Baba's shop was. The sun had almost set when I finally reached it, a small grocery in a poor neighborhood. It was Tuesday 4 February 1986.

I opened the door, and inside was warmth from a brown enameled wood-burning stove, beside which sat Hajji Baba. His murids stood around him attentively, mostly middle-aged Turkish women in winter coats and headscarves, but also some men, in stocking caps and knee-length overcoats. Most wore slip-on

rubber shoes over their *khuffs*, the leather socks used in wintertime for wiping upon in place of washing the feet in ablution.

The sheikh himself was an elderly man, full in face and figure, and at present warmly dressed for winter. He had black eyebrows and glasses, with keen penetrating eyes that took me in at a glance. A great turban on his head made of several woolen scarves defied the Turkish Hat Law of the 1920s. He wore a shirt and vest under his long cloth coat, and wide traditional *sarwal* trousers that tapered to the ankles below. Through an interpreter, I explained that I had come to see about marrying a murid of his named Besa Krasniqi. She was a twenty-three-year-old Albanian girl born and raised in New Zealand, one of the few non-Turkish disciples he then had.

As we spoke, I talked to him about my current work translating the *Reliance* into English, and told him about my sheikh and my life in Jordan, and that I was a Shadhili. He accepted all this, and was later to say that the genuine tariqas were twelve in number, and to affirm from his *kashf* or 'being shown the unseen' that Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was a true murshid. In the end he found my words acceptable, and the next morning I was permitted to meet the girl in the pots-and-pans shop next to his grocery store under the eye of a chaperone, where we talked about marriage, life, and the spiritual path.

It was bitterly cold and gray outside, and our breath smoked in the closed shop. The young lady was wrapped up, I remarked to myself, like a cabbage, in layers of wool clothing from which her face peered out. I was bundled up in heavy black padded coveralls surmounted by a thick overcoat, with a stocking-cap on my head and a black-checked Arab headcloth around my neck, all of which made me look somewhat larger than life.

She had come from New Zealand with her family to Istanbul when her father's work took him there in 1982, but then met Hajji Baba and his murids, and never gone back. The sheikh had taught her the practice of Islam, and then had her go to Cairo to study Arabic in a program offered to foreign women students by al-Azhar University.

We had in common that both of us were students, living on a

shoestring in Eastern lands to learn our religion. She seemed to have that pioneering New Zealand spirit, was used to doing without, and inured to the life we would have together in Jordan if we decided to marry. We warmed to each other's words. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman had already told me she was fine, and when Hajji Baba later seconded it, we agreed to get married. We made the contract the next day, and as her marriage portion I gave her a hundred dollars, with another hundred grams of gold due in ten years. Hajji Baba let us meet briefly after that, but felt the neighborhood would be scandalized by two young people loitering about. So I left a few days later and did not see her again till after seven months, when her father brought her and her belongings to Jordan for the wedding feast given for us by Sheikh Yunus and Hajj Kamal. Besa, now known as "Umm Sahl" in deference to the sunna of married women taking a *kunya* or agnomen, well vindicated the judgement of the sheikhs as a wife, helpmate, and friend.

We lived together in Jordan, and the differences in our daily wirds and tariqa were to cast light on my own Shadhili path in ways that make them useful to set forth in a separate chapter here. I asked Umm Sahl in those years about quite a few things, and she would explain the teachings of her sheikh. But it was not until a year and a half later, when her late roommate Hedaya Hartford married Ashraf Muneeb in Cairo at Hajji Baba's directive and they moved to Jordan, that I heard many anecdotes of the sheikh and his way. Umm Sahl and I could only afford to go to Istanbul once every year or two, while Hedaya was something of a protégée who had spent months in Zeytinburnu with the sheikh and women murids during her summer and winter holidays, particularly before she was married. So she saw and heard more from Hajji Baba than others, and together with my wife, Ashraf, and Manal, also of Cairo, provided much of what I know and relate about him.

When Hedaya first became Umm Sahl's roommate at the foreign women's dormitory in Cairo, she was just off the boat from the American Muslim scene. The default setting there was, and is, Wahhabism, because of the financial ties cultivated by

Saudi Arabia and its religious leaders with major American Muslim organizations, mainly offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, in mosques and on campus. Hedaya, for example, was vehemently opposed to the perceived *bid'a* or blameworthy innovation of such things as Umm Sahl's rosary, and the whole idea of a tariqa and a sheikh who supervised the details of a murid's life. Umm Sahl finally invited her to come to Istanbul and see the sheikh for herself, then reach a judgement. She said, "I haven't seen anyone who practices as much Islam as he does." So Hedaya had gone, and her response had been to become his disciple. It was thus mainly from the taqwa and practice of my wife, but also from Hedaya and Ashraf's living in Jordan in the 1980s, that Hajji Baba had his not inconsiderable effect on me. His was a tariqa of profound change in the disciple's life as he himself had been changed by it, and he was not someone who did things by halves.

He had been born İhsan Tamgüney in 1904 in the village of Lome in Artvin, the far northeastern province of Turkey adjoining the mountainous Caucasus regions that included Chechnya and Daghestan. His grandfather had been a financial inspector in Ottoman times who had been attacked and killed by bandits. His father was a teacher in the latter years of the empire and had died when Hajji Baba, the second of three sons, was but seven years old. He was raised as an orphan by his older brother Nazmi, who in time found work to support the family as a schoolteacher more than five hundred miles to the west in Zonguldak on the Black Sea coast. Hajji Baba was remarkable as a young boy for his attraction to dhikr and prayer. He frequented the gatherings of the Naqshbandi and Qadiri tariqas when he could, and as a child once climbed up a tree at sunset for several consecutive nights looking for the new moon of Ramadan to begin fasting.

At the instance of a spiritual experience at the age of twenty, he set off wandering with friends in the Adapazarı-Bolu region in northwestern Turkey, and came to settle in Kursun, to the east of Bursa. During these years he worked in turn as an itinerant tinker, a seller of sewing notions, and a shopkeeper.

He served in the Turkish Republican army, where he remembered he used to sneak into the latrines to perform the strictly

forbidden five obligatory daily Muslim prayers. To pray in such a place was not countenanced by the rules of fiqh, but as he later said: "The prayers I made there are still standing: they were the best prayers I ever performed—because of the threat."

He retired from the army in 1937, and married and moved to Zeytinburnu in Istanbul with his wife, who bore him five children. "When I first came to this neighborhood," he recalled, "I tried to change things by giving hellfire sermons in the mosque. I would look up, and people would be going to sleep. Then I began giving people the dhikr, and things started to change around here."

He was a veteran dervish who effected a sea-change in his neighborhood and in a great many of those who came into contact with him. He had great baraka. He organized and conducted pilgrimages to Mecca for Turkish Muslims, hence his nickname *Hajji* or Pilgrim. Those who went on the bus with him to Mecca and Medina seldom saw him lift his eyes from the Koran, either on the way down or the way back. He particularly disliked what he termed a "shopping hajj," and by his example kept those with him at their proper worship. When he entered the Prophet's Mosque in Medina (Allah bless him and give him peace), he would stand at a great distance from the tomb and give his greetings from there, as he felt himself unworthy to get any closer.

He followed the tariqa of Muhammad Baha' al-Din Naqshband of Bukhara (d. 791/1389), who traced his *silsila* to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) through the Companion Abu Bakr. Hajji Baba's line of the path converged with both the ancient Qadiri tariqa and the Suhrawardi tariqa in the person of Khalid al-Baghdadi, the great nineteenth-century Kurdish renewer of the Naqshbandi tariqa who died in Damascus. When asked of his tariqa, Hajji Baba would sometimes say "Khalidi" after Khalid, and sometimes "Naqshbandi-Qadiri" in view of its founders.

Naqshbandis have been called the "Silent Dervishes" because of the almost meditative quality of their "dhikr of the heart" emphasized by many of its sheikhs in various lands and times. Historically, it had been an urban tariqa that attracted many ulema,

and under its later Chechen and Daghestani sheikhs, included many mujahideen. The most famous of the latter had been Sheikh Shamyl al-Daghestani, who fought the Russian Imperium in his country for more than three decades, the "Murid Wars" celebrated by Tolstoy in his *Hajji Murad* and by others, before he was finally defeated and exiled. With his defeat, a group of Daghestanis under their sheikh, Sharaf al-Din Bingöl, migrated to the village of Güneyköy near Bursa in Turkey, where they established a Naqshbandi *dergah* or Sufi lodge, and the sheikh later died and was buried in the cemetery that overlooks the town. The times he lived through and the final collapse of the Ottoman caliphate appear to have led him to conclude that there would be no murshid after him until the end of days. His daughter-in-law, whom I met in her nineties but still receiving visitors at this village *dergah*, said that he never gave ijaza to any sheikh after him, seemingly because of his imminent expectation of the long-awaited Mahdi, whose name appears on a plaque on the *dergah* wall of their *silsila* directly after the name of Sheikh Sharaf al-Din himself.

According to Hajji Baba's daughter Fatima, her father had been invested as a murshid by one of the two Qadiri sheikhs with whom he had trained in the 1920s and 1930s in the western Turkish countryside. But in the world of the *barzakh* or 'isthmus' between death and resurrection, he considered Sheikh Sharaf al-Din to be his sheikh and mentor, even if the sheikh had passed on from this world in 1936, shortly before Hajji Baba's discharge from the Turkish army at Kars in eastern Turkey. He had an ongoing spiritual relationship with the deceased sheikh, whose grave he visited regularly over the years, and whom he considered himself the disciple of by *Uwaysiyya*, or 'spiritually taking from someone one has never physically met.' This is disallowed by our sheikhs, perhaps because of the latitude it allows ordinary people for self-deception. In any case, Hajji Baba certainly reflected the *himma* or high resolve of the Naqshbandi way which Sheikh Sharaf al-Din represented, and he showed himself in his own training of murids a worthy scion of that sheikh's tradition.

Hajji Baba could read and write the officially outlawed

Ottoman language in its traditional Arabic script, and only later did he learn the Latin alphabet with which Turkish was henceforth to be spelled in the new republic. The rest of his life was largely spent healing the spiritual and sometimes physical diseases that sprang up in Muslim hearts in the wake of the deliberate wreckage of a six-hundred-year-old Islamic civilization by those he regarded as traitors and apostates. He lived through heartbreak after heartbreak in the war of annihilation against religion conducted under the name of "secularism." As Atatürk said in an address to the new republic in 1927 explaining why Sufism was now illegal in Turkey:

> Gentlemen: While the Law for the Restoration of Order was in force there also took place the closing of the tekkes, convents, and mausoleums, as well as the abolition of all sects, and all titles such as sheikh, dervish, murshid, çelebi, fortune-teller, magician, mausoleum guard, and so on. One can imagine how necessary the carrying out of these measures was in order to prove that our nation as a whole was no primitive nation, filled with superstitions and prejudices. Could a civilized nation tolerate a mass of people who let themselves be led by the nose by a herd of sheikhs, dedes, sayyids [Prophetic descendants], çelebis, babas, and emirs who entrusted their destiny and their lives to palm readers, magicians, dice-throwers, and amulet sellers? (*The Great Speech* [8], 714).

Hajji Baba felt his whole life and mission was a jihad for the return of the lost religion. "My life's work," he once noted, "has been to dig a little hole in the ground, then see a truck come and dump a mountain of dirt on it, then to dig down until I could begin anew, only to see another truck come do the same thing, and then another and another." He taught murids by his courage and fortitude to face such adversity with undaunted persistence.

He strongly emphasized Muslim unity, and would frequently recite the word of Allah Most High "Hold fast to the rope of Allah all together and divide not asunder" (Koran 3:103), repeating the last words several times. He would meet with Muslim

politicians such as Necmeddin Erbakan and Süleyman Arif Emre and would write them with advice, in sometimes weekly letters. He encouraged murids to vote for Islamic parties. He read the Islamic party's Milli Gazete newspaper regularly and advised disciples to buy and read it. He encouraged wealthy Muslims to invest in factories and businesses that could contribute to the return of Islam. In general, he encouraged peaceful political change towards a society in which the Holy Koran ruled, saying, "Our job is not using weapons: we should throw roses at those who throw stones at us." He also said: "The most ready-to-hand weapon today is the pen. So write, and bring down the citadel of *kufr* (unbelief)."

He was convinced of the importance of women in reestablishing Islam, and himself dealt primarily with women, who constituted about 70 percent of his murids. He once said, "They beat us through women, so we'll beat them through women," alluding to the tremendous effect of wives and mothers on society. Some say a woman's husband is best to educate her in religious matters, though the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) did not confine himself to that, but taught them personally. A rigorously authenticated hadith relates: "Women said to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), 'Men have prevailed on you over us, so set aside a day for us of your own choosing.' So he promised them a day, and met them on it, admonishing them and enjoining them" (*Bukhari* [17], 1.36: 101. 8). The Prophet's own wife 'A'isha personally taught the 2,210 hadiths she related from him (Allah bless him and give him peace) to some 17 women and 156 *men*, whom Imam Dhahabi mentions by name, omitting to list "a throng besides those" (*Siyar al-nubala'* [26], 2.136–39). Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, like Hajji Baba, had women disciples, perhaps 5 to 10 percent of his murids, and gave a special lesson for some of them on Saturday of each week. Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, on the other hand, preferred the way of greater precaution, and though he answered the questions of women who came to him, even about the most intimate details, dismissed lessons with the words "Were she Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, and I Hasan al-Basri, I wouldn't teach her the ABC's." Yet Hajji Baba was very

conservative and formal in his dealings with women, and taught that otherwise, even a sheikh could be expelled from the Divine Presence.

The result Hajji Baba aimed at in his *tarbiya* or spiritual training was closeness to Allah through love, application, and dedication to the religion. He felt a grave responsibility for returning the Umma to the laws of the Koran (ahkam al-Qur'an). By inculcating taqwa and Iman, he hoped to produce murids who would be *mujahid*s or 'those expending *effort* (jihad)' working for a return to Islam in their societies. He told disciples, "You must be ready to go into the very hellfire to pull out the Muslims." It was a supreme honor to serve the Umma in any capacity. He believed that commitment to the rule of the Koran was incumbent upon every Muslim, and regarded hajj as an international summit for Muslims to come together and discuss their problems. This focus was not "political Islam" in his eyes, but merely part of a Muslim's relationship with Allah; that one be directed towards the Divine with one's entire being, including one's historical moment and political message—for the sake of Allah, not for the sake of winning or losing in this world. He would say, "Whenever the awliya's hearts become preoccupied with a problem of the next world, they perform ablution (wudu) from the thought; whenever their hearts become preoccupied with a problem of *this* world, they perform the purificatory *bath* (ghusl)."

He gave little importance to *karamat* or miracles, though many were vouchsafed to him, of which I remember a few. One was his ability to tell by looking at a person whether they were in a state of major ritual impurity (janaba) and had not yet performed the purificatory bath.

One day Hajji Baba asked a woman murid, "What are you going to tell Allah about those two children?" In the course of a Western life abroad, she had had two abortions, which she had not told anyone about before returning to Turkey to embrace a more religious life.

On visits to his store in later years, I used to watch people come in with "incurable" diseases and be seated before him. He would sit in his chair and raise his hands, palms upward, fingers

slightly parted, then recite something to himself, probably verses of the Koran, moving the thumbs of each hand over his fingertips. At the end of his reading, he would lightly touch the shoulder of the person with the back of his right hand, then have them leave or make an appointment to come again later. He would often tell them to perform the prayer, do a particular dhikr, repent and change, or to eliminate certain things from their lives such as television. People would come in regularly for a week, or two or three, and leave completely cured, often of terminal diseases for which there was no conventional treatment.

At first I mused as to what he might be reciting, but then realized it was the totality of his state (hal) with Allah, his *wilaya*, that furnished a clue to the supernatural events that appeared at his hands. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had said, "How many an unkempt person, pushed away from doorsteps, were he to swear an oath upon Allah, He would certainly vindicate it" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2024: 2622. S).

He once said of his store: "This is a hospital. Whether people have physical or spiritual diseases, outward or inward, they can be cured." He then gestured at his neck and added, "But we can't do anything for above here"—meaning the solid wall in many people of following their mind's conclusions in everything, which prevents the light of having a sheikh and a tariqa from entering the heart. Although he prayed for the sick, he considered written amulets worthless and useless. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, by contrast, had tawfiq from Allah with them and used to write them out for people, or in his last years even photocopy them. With the entire agreement of Hajji Baba and Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman on essentials of the Sufi path, the differences in their character and sometimes their views made me wonder, as I had with Sheikh Yunus, about the nature of human sanctity (wilaya).

Knowing them made me believe first, that if a wali, as Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman affirmed, is someone whom Allah has given victory over his four enemies, the ego, the Devil, this world, and willful impulse (hawa), still he is not divinely protected from error (ma'sum) as the prophets are. The wali is thus not someone who never errs, though Allah normally protects him from it, but

someone who if he makes a slip, it is generally unpremeditated, and followed by heartbrokenness and repentance. This is why Sufis take as a principle that "one should defer to the awliya in the way they personally are, but not imitate them in matters that exceed the sunna."

Second, when Sufis say of *tarbiya* or spiritual training, "The mistake of the sheikh is better than the correctness of the murid," they do not mean that the sheikh is omniscient or in principle incapable of error, but rather that the overall trajectory of his spiritual training, by Allah's tawfiq, results in the murid's reaching Allah, something incomparably better for him than "being right" on a particular point, while a disciple caught up in his analogical intellect and its corrections will tend to remain as he is. A student's personal reasoning (ijtihad) about the process of the spiritual way must be conditioned by what the sheikh teaches and is, which is why Abu Madyan once said, "The price of Sufism is entire submission." Matters of the unlawful of course do not come under this heading, for one's duty to every Muslim is to correct anything unlawful. But what I learned from those I met is that if to err is human, the favor of Allah is far greater, and the wali is someone whom Allah loves and gives tawfiq despite himself, so as to speak.

Thirdly, the differences between the awliya and their various human qualities show the fallacy of making any traits besides those specifically praised by the sunna a criterion for a "saintly type." Some of the awliya are bold, like 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, and some are meek, like Hassan ibn Thabit; some are rough, and some are smooth; some are outgoing, while others are shy. As Ibn 'Ata Illah said, "Exalted beyond ken is He who has veiled the secret of electhood in the manifestation of humanity; and who is manifest in the immensity of His Lordship by the manifesting of one's slavehood" (*al-Hikam* [49], 38: 108). The Companion Ibn Mas'ud used to say: "The believer may harbor within him any of the qualities of human nature, except treachery and deceit" (*Ibn Abi Shayba* [45], 13.150: 26116. S). So as mentioned above about *ma'rifa*, it seems fitter to consider the wali's closeness to Allah to be a *personal* relationship rather than a magnitude of "degree"

in a single continuum of "electhood." Or to say it again, Allah manifests His uniqueness in every creature.

When the Russians invaded Afghanistan in December of 1979, Hajji Baba said the war would finish the Soviet Union as a superpower. I remember that when my wife told me this, I thought that, after all, people say a lot of things, and for the sake of our domestic tranquility, it would be better not to comment. A shopkeeper in Istanbul could not be expected to know everything about world events. Then in a few years, to the expectation of almost no one, what he said happened.

He used to visit the tombs of the awliya in Istanbul, and every year would go for a few days with his murids to Güneyköy to visit the tomb of Sheikh Sharaf al-Din and stay in the *dergah* in the village below the hilltop cemetery.

Hajji Baba often mentioned *ruhânî*s or celestial beings, perhaps angels, with whom he was in contact, and by whom Allah carried out many of His decrees. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had said:

> When Allah loves a servant, He proclaims to Gabriel: "Verily Allah loves So-and-so, so love him," and Gabriel loves him. Then Gabriel calls unto the celestials (ahl al-sama): "Verily Allah loves So-and-so, so all of you love him," and the celestials love him. And then acceptance is put for him among terrestrials (*Bukhari* [17], 8.17: 6040. S).

In the mid-1980s, when a number of suitors were seeking Hedaya's hand in marriage, Hajji Baba told her she would marry Ashraf, and they made their marriage contract within a week. Things were not done that way in America, and she had cried for a month between the contract and the wedding day, but in the end they were united in Cairo, fell in love and became fast friends, and remained happily married thereafter. The sheikh told her, "The *ruhânî*s arranged it in a single day." He also told her that he had travelled to America in his soul when she was first born, and that he had been shown her and told, "This murid is yours."

He had a black cat with him in the store who would some-

times sit on his lap and be petted. It would distinguish friend from foe, and he once explained to murids, "It's not a cat," meaning it was another being in that form.

One day he was looking outside and saw the prescribed prayers of each person praying at the first of the prayer's time rising from earth to sky in a beautiful and vigorous form. Later, when he looked again, he saw other people's prayers rising, but weakly and with difficulty. At the end of the time, he again looked, and saw the prayers of the people who had put it off to the last moment rising, but so feebly that they could barely struggle upward.

Another *kashf* of his was that he warned his murids in Cairo, mostly women whom Hedaya had recruited to the tariqa, that the adhan or muezzin's call to the dawn prayer there was a few minutes early, so to wait until ten minutes after it to begin the prayer. When I visited Cairo, I checked this against astronomical data, and found the azan was in fact given about eight minutes early. It was not plain by what means someone five hundred miles away might know such a thing. There was no Internet. He also remarked at this period that there was not a single true murshid of the Sufi path in Cairo. That was how he was, he would say things that made me wonder how he could possibly know, and upon checking the things possible to check, I would find them as he had said.

Umm Sahl and I made four trips to Turkey to visit Hajji Baba, the longest of which was when I left her for a month in Zeytinburnu with him and murids while I went back to Damascus to review the previous year's work on *Reliance of the Traveller* with Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, and then returned to take her home. I remember getting out at some stops on the road, and wondering aloud if I would get lung cancer from the platoon of blazing cigarette smokers in the sealed bus. Yet they were journeys of knowledge, and we found their baraka stretched far beyond their miles.

In a very real sense Hajji Baba was the emissary of a mighty civilization, summarizing in himself much of the soul of Ottoman spiritual and mystical culture by his invariable practice of the adab or conduct of those he was heir to. If not highly studied in the

sciences of Islam, he was a true wali and murshid with an instinctive grasp of the significance of modern people and events within the whole fabric of the religion. Certainly his daily worship and his approach to taqwa had a great deal to do with this spiritual state, and I will try to recount what I saw and knew of it.

Of the central foundations of his Sufi practice was perpetual ritual purity (tahara). This was the wont of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), who said, "No one remains upon ablution (wudu) but a true believer" (*Ibn Hibban* [53], 3.311: 1037. S). When once greeted with "Peace be upon you," the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) performed ablution before he returned the greeting, explaining, "I disliked mentioning a name of Allah Mighty and Majestic [i.e. 'Peace'] without ritual purity" (*Abu Dawud* [94], 1.5: 17. S). Sha'rani mentions the awliya's solemn compact with Allah to

> always remain on ablution, and renew it [before prescribed prayers even when one already has it], to be in a state of readiness for the divine experiences (waridat ilahiyya) that come; since the favor He bestows on His servants is unceasing, day or night, and someone in whom Allah Most High opens the eye of mystic insight finds himself ever seated before Allah Mighty and Majestic. This is particularly imperative for the major ulema and the righteous, as most of the divine intuitions of the outward and inward sciences descend upon them, while many neglect this (*al-'Uhud al-Muhammadiyya* [93], 36).

Few of the spokesmen of Sufism, whether Ghazali, Suhrawardi, Makki, Ibn al-'Arabi, or others, fail to mention perpetual purity, which was also the way of the four Sufis I have mentioned in previous chapters, their sheikhs, and indeed all who know anything about the spiritual path.

Hajji Baba also fasted most days of the year, unlike the sheikhs of our path, who tended to observe only the obligatory and main sunna fast days. Both he and murids would fast the entire Islamic months of Rajab, Sha'ban, Ramadan, Dhul Qa'da, Dhul Hijja, and Muharram. At the end of his life he fasted perpetually,

because he said there was so much of the haram in the world that he hoped Allah would excuse the food he ate because he had been fasting before and after it. In his early years, on the days of Eid when it is legally impermissible to fast, he would likewise go without food or drink all day to mortify his *nafs* or ego, but finally take a sip of water before sunset so he would not legally be "fasting."

In Hajji Baba's training, the purpose of the murid taking the tariqa was to fight the murid's *nafs*, and the purpose of the sheikh was to help him in that fight. He underscored the two most fundamental conditions of *wilaya* or sanctity: Iman and taqwa. Allah has said: "Lo, verily the friends of Allah, never need they be feared for, nor shall they grieve: Those who believe, and are ever godfearing. Theirs are the great good tidings in this life and the next: There is no changing the words of Allah: That is the mighty triumph" (Koran 10:62–64). Only the person of deep taqwa and Iman, Hajji Baba taught, could hope to be at the level of tariqa and Ihsan (spiritual excellence). He worked to imbue his disciples with these fundamental states so their Sufism could become real.

Hedaya had come one time in the early days from Cairo, and he looked at her and said, "Welcome, welcome," but after a few minutes asked, "What have you done with your hand, Hedaya? Why is your hand complaining against you?" She was dumbfounded, and the only thing she could think of was stealing something—and she hadn't done that—and yet he repeated himself. "Your hand is talking. You've done *something*. What is it?" She said that she hadn't done anything, but he kept returning to it until some of the murids began murmuring, "She's lying."

It was only after the nightfall prayer that she finally remembered. "Well nothing, but one of the sheikhs at al-Azhar insisted on shaking my hand, and I finally shook his hand with the cloth of my *tarha* (waist-length headcover) in between so the hands wouldn't actually touch, because I thought it was only offensive (makruh), not haram. He was seventy years old."

For all his regard for Hedaya, Hajji Baba was completely disgusted. "*Eşek!*" he said, "You donkey! Why do you fast or pray? You don't have any taqwa!" He told her that all one's taqwa van-

ishes when one compromises one's principles. Shaking hands with a non-*mahram* or 'family member' of the opposite sex was unlawful in all four Sunni schools of fiqh—the revelation being keen to obviate anything leading to sexual harassment—and legal tricks were just not in the dictionary of Hajji Baba. To be sure, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was no different on this matter; when I once asked him about a Sufi sheikh in Cairo who shook hands with women, he said, "It is obligatory to warn people against him: he is someone perpetrating a serious new evil (sahib bid'a)."

Hajji Baba's anger in such cases would lift some of the intensity of the guilt, and murids learned how to avert the anger of Allah by making *tawba* or repentance. "He taught us," as Hedaya later said, "that it was gross to do anything haram, and we should be wary of doing the offensive. It gave us a seriousness about our relationship with Allah. It was for our benefit, putting us on a higher plane of scrupulousness. He put us in a fire and shaped the steel. After that, I thought: The next non-*mahram* sheikh who wants to shake my hand, I'll just cut it off and give it to him."

Hajji Baba gave great importance to *suhba* or companionship with the good, and said that much of the baraka of the earliest period of Islam came from the relationship between the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and his Companions. He said, "A breath spent outside of *suhba*, dhikr, or prayer is spent in vain"; and likewise blamed murids for keeping the *suhba* of the *'awamm* or 'common people' with no concern for the way of taqwa and Iman, saying that this poisoned one's *suluk*.

At sunset on most days, he would cross the street from his shop to his house, where the women had prepared an *iftar* for everyone who was fasting. They prayed the sunset prayer then ate the meal quickly. After this, they would perform the Naqshbandi hadra. Hajji Baba would sit leading it in his own room while the women followed in an adjoining room, the women not mixing with men. Murids in other parts of the city would meet for it at one of their own homes.

They would gather together for the hadra, sitting back on their heels. They would begin with *Istighfar* or asking Allah's forgiveness, then recite the word *Allah* together, pronouncing it

lightly in a voice that was audible, though not loud. With the first syllable they would breathe in, turning the head slightly to the right and lifting the right hand a little from the thigh, then with the second syllable breathing more forcibly out, bringing the head back to center and lowering the hand. They did this very naturally in unison together, increasing in tempo and strength, saying *Allah* with the two movements several hundred times.

Group dhikrs in which breathing is simultaneous and rhythmic have a palpable effect on participants, lifting them from their individual concerns to the pure group remembrance of Allah. As the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said in a rigorously authenticated hadith, "No group of people join together making dhikr of Allah, save that angels surround them, mercy envelops them, tranquility descends upon them, and Allah mentions them to those near to Him" (*Ahmad* [52], 18.389: 11892. S). Hajji Baba's murids found this in the hadra, and drew strength from it to live religious lives in an increasingly despiritualized or even hostile world.

When Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was asked about the Shadhili hadra, he would mention the words of Imam Junayd "Everything permissible that facilitates dhikr is legally recommended (mandub)." In this connection, whoever intends to benefit from any Sufi order needs to understand a closely related point, that of *bid'a hasana* or excellent innovation in Islam. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) attested to it by saying:

> Whoever inaugurates a good custom (sunna hasana) in Islam shall have the reward for it and that of anyone who does it after him, without this diminishing their own rewards in the slightest. And whoever inaugurates a bad custom (sunna sayyi'a) in Islam shall bear the sin of it and that of anyone who does it after him, without this diminishing their own sin in the slightest (*Muslim* [74], 2.705: 1017. S).

The effectiveness of rhythmic group dhikr in unifying and purifying hearts, something good in itself as a custom, to say nothing of the good pleasure of Allah borne out by the first hadith above, is the reason why most tariqas retain it in some form or another. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman considered it an essential part of the

path, and many still remember that when he could no longer walk at the end of his life, he had himself carried down in a chair, week after week, to attend the hadra at the Nuriyya Mosque.

After Hajji Baba's murids finished the main body of the hadra in this fashion, they did the same for shorter spaces of time first with *La ilaha illa Llah* ("There is no god but Allah"), then with a short form of the Blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). Hajji Baba would then finish with a *du'a* or supplication aloud, either by himself, or by someone else chosen for their moving and heartfelt supplications. This often lasted as long as the dhikr had, perhaps forty-five minutes. It was characteristic of Hajji Baba and his disciples that it was wholly and invariably for the Muslim Umma.

This was a point with Hajji Baba. There was little in his concerns for himself, but a great deal for the Umma. As the early Sufi Ja'far al-Khuldi put it, "The striving of freemen is for the sake of their brothers, not themselves"; Hajji Baba's supplications were for all Muslims. He donated the reward of his Koran recital to the mujahideen in Afghanistan to help them defeat the Russians, or to others elsewhere, and had his murids do the same. When standing at 'Arafat on hajj, he told disciples not to make supplication for themselves or their families, but for the Umma. His unchanging plea to Allah was for *ahkam al-Qur'an*, that Allah might again let the Koran rule Muslim lands.

On New Year's Eve, he would gather murids together for a special session of dhikr and supplication so that Allah might not send an all-engulfing chastisement down upon mankind for the disobedience committed that night.

Although he never missed *tahajjud* or night vigil prayer after having slept, he nevertheless adopted the way of the Companion Abu Bakr (Allah be well pleased with him) in offering his three *rak'a*s (cycles of prayer) of *witr* (lit. the "odd" number of *rak'a*s that close a day's prayers) before going to bed at night, rather than after *tahajjud*, as is more usual—lest he miss them and thereby omit a duty, since in the Hanafi school which he followed *witr* was obligatory. In everything, he followed the "way of greater precaution."

At one o'clock in the morning, every night of the year, he would awaken from his sleep to begin his day of worship. He never used an alarm clock, yet never missed a time. He would rise, make ablution, offer eight rak'as, then sit down to his wird of dhikr, which was mostly the Koran. He would finish the entire Koran once a week, making the traditional supplication at its end (khatm). It was also his practice to recite a daily portion of the *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, Imam Jazuli's well known manual of Blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace).

He would eat a predawn meal to prepare for his day's fast, then return to the Koran until the day had grown light outside, when he would go to pray the dawn prayer in the mosque a little before sunrise, as is the practice in many Turkish mosques. When Umm Sahl first took the tariqa from him in 1982, he prayed all of the five daily prayers in the mosque, walking up the street with his cane. But as old age overtook him, he would pray with some of the murids in his home.

When he had finished the dawn prayer and the Prophetic dhikrs that follow the prayers, he would go to his shop, where he would give instruction or admonition to murids and recite over sick people. After the sun was up, he would pray two rak'as for *ishraq* (sunrise), then renew his ablution and offer eight rak'as of *duha* or midmorning prayer.

He worked in his shop all day, sometimes reciting the Koran or his other wirds, sometimes giving advice or praying for people who came in. Just as the earliest Muslims had spiritual states like those of the later awliya, but spoke little of them because they were at a foundational stage of Islam, struggling for its very survival, so too Hajji Baba seemed to regard the present day as so inimical to the very existence of the religion that effort, the literal meaning of "jihad," to reestablish Islam's bases was fitter to focus upon than private spiritual development. He taught disciples the realities of the deepest levels of the religion, but was more of a lifeboat for the drowning than a spiritual mentor for the elect. Like Central Asian masters of earlier times, he would occasionally subject disciples to harrowing tests to recast their old habits of thinking and doing, and bring to fruition their spiritual sincerity

(ikhlas). It was a style that few teachers today could attempt, not only because of the times and the people, but because of the plausibility it lends to pretenders taking advantage of others—though one certainly looked in vain to Hajji Baba for anything that was off. He was all business, and his business was Allah. Yet the tests he gave were the exception, and mostly he kept murids busy at their prayers and dhikr, which purified them inwardly, and he taught them to overcome sins. His invariable question was "What are you going to tell Allah about what you did?"

When a seeker took the way from him, the sheikh would have him take a complete bath (ghusl), pray two rak'as, say three times the Testification of Faith *La ilaha illa Llah, Muhammadun rasulu Llah* ("There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah"), then seventy *Istighfar*s ("I ask Allah's forgiveness"), the Fatiha or opening sura of the Koran, then eleven times Sura al-Ikhlas (Koran 112), then Sura al-Falaq (113) and Sura al-Nas (114) each once. The murid would donate the reward of these to the awliya, to the earlier masters of the path, and to all Muslims.

The daily wird for beginners was three hundred times *La ilaha illa Llah*, three hundred times *Allah* recited silently in the heart while counting it on a rosary, and one hundred times *Allahumma salli 'ala sayyidina Muhammad wa alihi wa sallim* ("O Allah bless our liegelord Muhammad and his folk and give them peace"). He used to say, "Dhikr is the sword of the Sufi," and, "Dhikr is the greater jihad." He recommended extra wirds for murids such as suras Ya Sin (Koran 36), al-Waqi'a (56), al-Fath (48), al-Mulk (67), and those of the last *juz'* or thirtieth part of the Koran. According to the level of the murid, he had everyone complete the entire Koran once a month, though the more advanced finished it once a week, and those who were illiterate read Sura al-Ikhlas three hundred times daily instead of a *juz'*.

After a time in the tariqa, he had murids also recite the name *Allah* silently in the heart thousands of times a day; some ten thousand, some up to a hundred. They counted these on a small *misbaha* of a hundred beads that they held in the right hand near the heart, moving it rapidly with the index finger while keeping track of its rounds on a larger *misbaha* held in the other hand.

When they finished all the beads of the larger rosary, they had completed ten thousand. It was the usual Naqshbandi technique for silent dhikr, though when I first saw my wife do it, I found it interesting because of its quickness, since the Supreme Name took us as long to say a single time as it did them a hundred; but also for the magnificent indifference it showed to Salafi criticisms of rosaries, by using not one but two at the same time.

I had once asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil about Wahhabi criticisms that rosaries were a *bid'a* or reprehensible innovation since Christians had used them before Muslims, and he said, "It doesn't matter who used them before; Islam has reconfirmed them." He then read a fatwa by Imam Suyuti that dhikr was counted on a knotted string by such early Muslims as the Companion Abu Hurayra. Suyuti also adduced that the sahih hadiths of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) counting dhikr on the hand were a proof *for* beads and not against them, since they showed the sunna character of using something besides one's head to count. The fatwa concluded that if one can accurately count on one's hand, it is superior, in view of the hadiths, but if not, then beads are better. Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil himself only used his hand, even for the *Wird al-'Amm*, which has hundreds, though Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to use a *misbaha* for wirds of large numbers. In the latter day I have even seen a prominent Salafi figure using a hundred rosary, probably for the sheer convenience of not having to count while making dhikr. In any case, Ottoman civilization raised *misbaha*s to a fine art, Hajji Baba regarded them as part of ordinary religious life, and when someone once raised the spectre of "Christian influence" to him, he rejoined, "Whoever says so is a Christian."

He also insisted that murids make up (qada) all previous obligatory prayers from before taking the tariqa. In point of fiqh, it was of course only necessary to make up those one had missed or was certain were invalid. But Hajji Baba had them repeat them all. Umm Sahl believes the probable reason for this was the general lack of fiqh and regular prayer in most of their previous lives. Thus, when many of the ladies of the neighborhood took the tariqa in their forties, fifties, or even sixties, they performed

decades' worth of both the five daily prescribed prayers and the three final daily rak'as of *witr* that the Hanafi school also considered obligatory. So everyone was quite busy, the least of them making up five past days per day, while many did ten. He had them make sure to repose for a moment (tuma'nina) in each movement of the prayer, and told them that otherwise they were not praying.

When finished making up their previous prayers, Hajji Baba stipulated that if they ever missed a current one—by sleeping past sunrise or anything else—they would have to repeat *all* their prayers from the very beginning. By these measures, they became extremely wary of anything that might cause them to miss a prayer. As one put it, "We used to sleep awake."

He also had murids pray eight rak'as of the *tahajjud* night vigil prayer and eight rak'as of the *duha* midmorning prayer as he did. Those with makeups only performed four rak'as of these, completing the number with four more of makeups. Like him also, everyone prayed two rak'as of *ishraq* after sunrise, and six *awwabin* after the sunset prayer and its sunnas, though those with makeups did them at these times instead.

Despite his rigorous training, Hajji Baba took it easy on beginning murids, or Muslims newly returned to Islamic practice. For some of the latter, he would have them start by merely praying the noon prescribed prayer and nothing besides. They would see the changes in their life, and would soon come to pray the others. He used to say, "It is easier to move a mountain than to get someone [not praying] to pray two rak'as." He was also lenient about the clothing of Turkish women interested in practicing Islam for the first time and did not insist on full Islamic attire to begin with, so that they might persist long enough to complete their way to becoming practicing Muslims.

He would distinguish in the tariqa between the way of Sufism and that of shari'a. Sufism was the way of godfearingness or taqwa, while shari'a was that of mere permissibility and fatwa. Sufism was the way of Ihsan or excelling in goodness, while shari'a was the way of ordinary Islam. Of the higher demands of Sufism, he said: "This is shari'a, while this is Sufism. If you

are at the level of taqwa and *'azima* (strictness) and have a fall, you fall into the halal, the permissible. But if you are at the level of shari'a and *rukhsa* (legal dispensations) and have a fall, you fall into the haram, the unlawful." The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had said, "Truly the lawful is plain and the unlawful is plain, and between the two are things that are doubtful, which many people know not. So whoever shuns the doubtful has vindicated his religion and his honor; while whoever falls into the doubtful falls into the unlawful" (*Bukhari* [17], 1.20: 52. S). If such taqwa was central to all true Sufism, it was even more so to Hajji Baba's.

It included a careful distinction between the licit and illicit in one's food. Food could only be purchased with money that was lawfully gotten, and it could not contain anything unlawful like pork, alcohol, or unslaughtered-animal products. So much was merely avoiding the haram, which is incumbent upon every Muslim. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had said:

> "O people: Truly Allah is good, accepting nothing but the good, and truly Allah has ordered believers to do that which He has ordered the prophetic messengers, saying, 'O Messengers: Eat lawfully of fair viands and work righteousness; Verily I know full well what you do' [Koran 23:51]; and 'O you who believe, eat of the good things We have provided you' [2:172]"; then the Prophet told of "a man on a long journey, disheveled and dusty, extending his hands to the sky: 'My Lord, my Lord'—while his food is haram, his drink is haram, his clothes are haram, and he has been nourished with the haram—so how should his prayers be answered?" (*Muslim* [74], 2.703: 1015. S);

meaning, Imam Nawawi notes, that "drink, food, clothes, and so forth should be entirely halal without anything doubtful in them; and that whoever may supplicate should be more concerned about this than anyone" (*Sharh Muslim* [75], 7.100).

Hajji Baba said, "If you eat the unlawful, no prayer (salat) will be accepted from you for forty days." And he said, "For one's supplication (du'a) to be answered, one may not even have a gram

of the haram." One day Hajji Baba bought meat from a butcher's shop and suffered spiritually from it. Returning to the shop, he found that the butcher sold imported meat. Its effect on him was so drastic that he completely ceased eating meat thereafter to keep it from ever happening again. He was less strict with murids, though he did have them eat of the halal, and from the work of their own hands, together with three other conditions. First, if food was cooked or slaughtered by another, it could be only by someone who prayed. Second, they could not eat food imported from non-Muslim countries. Third, if bought from a store, it could not sell alcohol.

When a number of the murids became Shadhilis in the years after Hajji Baba's death, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman did not have them follow the last three rules, but merely eat the halal and not the haram. The marketplace in Damascus contained little imported food, and many of the considerations that Hajji Baba had to deal with in Turkey were largely nonexistent, but when Ashraf specifically asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman about not buying from stores in the West that sold pork or alcohol, he said, "No, the important thing is that *you* don't buy any."

Hajji Baba was nearly as strict about *israf* or wastefulness as he was about food, and taught that wastefulness and envy were especially hated by Allah. He told murids not to waste money on expensive weddings, which took away the baraka, and were a major reason why many marriages today fail. When he heard of Umm Sahl and Hedaya in Cairo buying food for a pet cat, he told them to feed it leftovers instead.

He dealt with different types of people in different ways: those with sicknesses, cancer, alcoholism, or social problems he would pray for and give a small amount of dhikr or Koran to recite. He said, "The spiritual suffering of whoever does not come to the alchemy of the Koran is great." He regarded many physical maladies as the price of ignoring the guidance of the prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace). He used to say, for example, that television caused cancer, and that the angels do not enter a house in which there is a television, "even if it is broken, in a cardboard box, under the bed." There is little doubt what he would have

said had he lived to see the motion picture industry set its wares before anyone who has a computer.

He also warned men and women against "soul fornication" (ruh zina), meaning sexual fantasies about other than one's spouse. How easily this is dismissed today merely shows how normative sexual licence has become. That such license is a viral infection in the body of mankind is shown by its effects upon the demography, the very survival, of peoples in the present age in whom it proceeds unchecked, or even encouraged by purblind myths of "personal freedom." It may gradually dawn on mankind that sexual licence produces utterly selfish men and women who lack the patience to have and care for families sufficient in size and psychic stability to maintain a people's survival. Like the women's movement, recreational drugs, homosexuality, and other darlings of modern liberalism, it is an evolutionary dead end. This is even truer of the "virtual licence" of cyber-porn, bringing with it the looming apparition of half the human race, women, utterly nauseated by the other half's addiction to it. Women simply do not empathize with men's low fascination with sordid sexual images. It merely repulses them, and they find it pathetic. Time alone will tell how love or trust or marriage can exist between a woman and a man for whom her respect is absolutely zero. Where there is no respect, there is nothing any woman would want to regard as a man, making friendship and intimacy impossible. The northern peoples of the world appear threatened today by nothing if not this, a *victimless* crime that merely extinguishes whole races. From Hajji Baba's perspective, it looks like a divine punishment for the hubris of moderns towards their Maker.

When a car once drove past Hajji Baba's shop grunting out a heavy disco beat, dying away as it rolled down the block, I heard him say, "*Hayvanlık* (animalism)." It typified the way he regarded man without religion, and his conviction that the primordial worth of a human being lay in his working relation with the Divine, his Iman and taqwa; and whatever prevented them was, in Hajji Baba's phrase, so much *zehir* or poison. He frequently used the metaphors of poison, disease, medicines, and cures to

describe events of the spiritual life, as Ghazali and other Sufis had used them before him. Imam Ghazali once said in a passage describing his ten-year Sufi reclusion before returning to public life and teaching—not coincidentally, with the illumination that enabled him to subsequently author his greatest religious and legal masterpieces:

> It became necessarily clear to me during that period, for reasons that I cannot number—at one time by mystical experience, another by discursive proof, yet another by acceptance on faith—that man is created of body and heart, and by *heart* I mean the reality of his spirit which is the locus of the knowledge (ma'rifa) of Allah, not the flesh and blood which the corpse and brute animal share in. And that the body possesses a health through which is its felicity, and a sickness in which lies its destruction; and that the heart too possesses a health and soundness, and no one is saved "but he who comes to Allah with a sound heart" [Koran 26:89]—and that it has a sickness in which lies its next-worldly, everlasting destruction, as Allah Most High has said, "In their hearts is sickness" [2:10]. And that ignorance of Allah is a deadly poison, and disobedience to Allah by pursuing selfish impulse (hawa) is its corrupting disease; and that the knowledge of Allah is its life-giving antidote, and obedience to Him by contravening selfish impulse is its healing medicine. And that there is no way to treat the heart through removing its disease and restoring its health except by medicines, just as there is no way to treat the body except through them (*al-Munqidh min al-dalal* [34], 58).

Of these medicines, the elements of a religious life, Hajji Baba particularly recommended five hundred *Istighfar*s ("I ask Allah's forgiveness") and five hundred of the Blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) as the minimum a Muslim might do in our times as an antidote against its many spiritual poisons, such as obliviousness to Allah (ghafla) or temptation (fitna), though in his final years he thought it should be a thousand.

Murids were busied by their copious wirds of daily dhikr, Koran recital, and prayer, which kept them from sin and heedlessness. When Münire Hanım, an upper-class educated woman who during Hajji Baba's lifetime translated his words into English for us, died in an Istanbul hospital some thirteen years after her sheikh, it was at noon, after having prayed her eight daily rak'as of *duha* midmorning prayer. It was typical. I asked Ashraf some time ago about the last time he had missed his *tahajjud*, and he thought for a moment, and said, "I've never missed it."

The sheikh gave them a firm grounding in the practices of the Naqshbandi order, and realized them in the *adab* or 'traditional conduct' practiced during the six centuries of Islamic culture in Ottoman Turkey. He taught his disciples to be noble and discriminating in moral principles and good character. He insisted that women of the path dress modestly and cover their heads at all times, even at home with their husbands, the only exception to which was in the bedroom. Though Münire Hanım's husband was a wealthy industrialist who had servants, the sheikh ordered her to cook all her husband's meals herself, and wash and iron his clothes. He had women serve their husbands, and husbands earn the living, because this was the way the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) divided the work between his own daughter Fatima and his son-in-law 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (Allah be well pleased with them). When one of the ladies from Cairo complained about her husband's unsympathetic Salafi outlook, and Hajji Baba learned he was of Al al-Bayt, the line of the Prophetic House, he directed her to respect him and serve him without demur because of his religious standing.

The books he encouraged murids to read were Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, the *Tarikatnâme* of Eşrefoğlu, the works of Rumi, the *Tariqa al-Muhammadiyya* of Birgivî, the *Ahmediye* and *Muhammediye* of Yazıcıoğlu Mehmet, the six classic Sunni hadith works, and traditional works of *tafsir* or Koranic exegesis.

But what he always returned to in his training was the adab in the Naqshbandi path to consult and follow the sheikh in every aspect of life. The readiness with which one can absorb and practice the teachings of the sheikh is the secret of progress in any

Sufi tariqa; as Allah says, "And closely follow the path of him who turns ever unto Me" (Koran 31:15). But while Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman generally let his *hal* be the guide, the way he inwardly and outwardly was, and the disciple's aspiration be the motive, Hajji Baba made many of the major decisions in disciples' lives. For instance, after teaching Umm Sahl the basic practices of Islam, he told her, "Go to Cairo, study religion, and teach people." And off she went. Similarly, when he decided that Hedaya would marry Ashraf in Egypt, that was that. The rule of conduct with the sheikh, as one murid put it, was "Obey him, or hit the door." As for murids visiting other Sufi sheikhs, he flatly said: "No; you have a sheikh and that's it. You have a way, do it."

He taught that if one committed certain sins, the *ruhânî*s or celestials would expel one from the tariqa; namely, fornication, lying, stealing, and a fourth one I can no longer remember. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, on the other hand, used to relate how a group of brethren once came to Sheikh al-Hashimi and told him that a certain murid had committed adultery and should be expelled from the tariqa. Sheikh al-Hashimi had held up a finger and asked them, "If something were wrong with my finger, would I just cut it off?" Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman said, "He wouldn't." But then added, "Unless it was gangrenous."

Despite Hajji Baba's perpetual fasting, or perhaps because of it, he never had a major illness until the end of his life. He distributed his wirds to various murids to continue after his death, and commissioned one of them, Vahit Amca, to read for the sick, though he appointed no successor to carry on after him as sheikh. He passed on from this world on 24 October 1991, and in accordance with his last wishes was buried in the cemetery above Güneyköy, not far from the tomb of his beloved Sheikh Sharaf al-Din. We visit them when we go to Turkey.

Looking back, what I found from Hajji Baba bore out everything that Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman had told me about the differences between our two orders, both in methods and results. Hajji Baba's inexorable discipline and rigor won my respect and inspired my own efforts at self-discipline, yet made me the more grateful for Allah's providence in connecting me with Sheikh

'Abd al-Rahman. What I probably benefited most from Hajji Baba was seeing the genuine taqwa with which he imbued his murids. The sheikh had been a living example to them that, as Dawud al-Ta'i (d. 165/781) of our *silsila* said, "Allah never took any servant from the humiliation of sins to the triumph of taqwa, save He made him rich without wealth, powerful without any kinsmen, and intimately loved without any human being." His *tarbiya* worked on others because it had worked on him.

His training demonstrated that one can become close to Allah by simply mastering the basics of a tariqa and never giving oneself the slightest leave to depart from them. It showed how small incremental changes can make a human being completely over anew. Murids who later became Shadhilis benefited from this. As Umm Sahl said, "He taught us to take the wirds with the utmost seriousness in our religion, so when we took the Shadhili tariqa, we followed through with the same determination and discipline that Hajji Baba had trained us with when he was alive." His training left them with the very essence of tariqa: not to waste a breath in what does not benefit one forever. Such lessons were not easily forgotten.

His way was especially effective because he taught them to defer to a guide in matters of the spirit and suspend the ordinary analogical intellect, with its confidence in itself and its judgements. This reliance on a sheikh preserved them, even after his death, from a great many wrong decisions; his word and example proved to be a powerful reason for tawfiq in their lives. He had taught them to exalt what he exalted, of all things connected with Islam; to hate what he hated, of unbelief and misguidance; and to love what he loved: Allah, the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), and the Umma.

Finally, his devotion to Sheikh Sharaf al-Din's Naqshbandi method unquestionably bequeathed him a spiritual state above and beyond that which he had gained from his original Qadiri path, which showed that not only the necessary training of a living sheikh, but also the specific genius of previous Sufis' teachings embodied in a normative *methodology* can be of tremendous benefit in the way. This is also why spiritual manuals have been writ-

ten by many of the greatest sheikhs, and why, for my part, I have tried to set forth in the next part of this volume the way of the Shadhili Order, to which we now return.

PART TWO

The Way

CHAPTER SIX

KNOWING THE PATH

THE main emphasis of the tariqa may be characterized as attachment of the heart to Allah Most High. Allah describes the way to this in His command to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) "Say, 'If you all love Allah, then follow me, and Allah will love you and forgive your sins; and Allah is all-forgiving, all-compassionate'" (Koran 3:31).

To *follow* the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in his lifetime was a simple matter for his Companions, who but said, "We hear and obey." As for afterwards, the Companions passed on their knowledge to those after them, and so on down to our own times, so that Allah's remembrance might be preserved, both His word, the Holy Koran, and the other wisdom brought by the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). Allah Most High says, "Verily We Ourselves have sent down the Reminding; And verily We shall ever preserve it" (Koran 15:9), which Allah in His wisdom has brought about through those who have borne the trust down through the ages, the scholars of this Umma. For the sake of scholarly quality and excellence we rely on the very foremost of them in each discipline, the Imams of the field, whether in Sacred Law, Koranic exegesis, hadith, Koran recital (tajwid), or the other disciplines. In this connection, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to say, "What the Imams have recorded *is* our religion."

One consequence of this is that all who are in the tariqa follow

one of the four Sunni *madhhabs* (schools) of fiqh: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, or Hanbali; as well as one of the two schools of *'aqida* or tenets of faith, Ash'ari or Maturidi. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was Shafi'i in jurisprudence, but accepted any other school that the student wished to follow, although he preferred that everyone follow the Ash'ari school in 'aqida because he found it sounder on some questions, a position on which I have followed him.

A second consequence is that we do not take our *din* or religion from those who are not Imams, especially Orientalists or authors without a traditional Islamic education at the hands of the tradition's sheikhs. University degrees, popular acclaim, and works in print all indicate the earnestness and effort of those who possess them, but cannot take the place, for religious purposes, of having an unbroken line of teachers extending back to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), who is the source of all religious knowledge ('ilm). This is as true of Sufism as any other part of the *din*. Ibn 'Ajiba says:

> In the path of Sufism, keeping the company of others (suhba) is of tremendous consequence in the journey to Allah, in accordance with the wont of Allah Most High and His wisdom. Some have even said, "Whoever has no sheikh [but travels the path alone] has the Devil as his sheikh." Another has said, "A person is like a [fruit] tree growing up in the wild: if not trimmed and pruned, it becomes a scrub." And Abul 'Abbas al-Mursi has said, "Whoever has no sheikh in this matter is not to be rejoiced over" (*Iqadh al-himam* [47], 1.75).

This is because the ego (nafs) which Allah describes as "ever prompting to do wrong" (Koran 12:53) seldom relinquishes its grip before the dawning on it of the overwhelming Oneness of the Divine. This is not realized by a little reading here and there, but by throwing one's whole entirety—body, mind, and soul—into the worship and remembrance of Allah as long as one has breath in one's body. Junayd's disciple Ruwaym once said, "This matter is only through expending one's very lifeblood, so if you can enter it on that condition, then do so. Otherwise, don't

occupy yourself with strange tales of the Sufis." The attachment to Allah that Sufism entails is a way of living and being that has to be absorbed from someone who has it, until it becomes one's own. A guide is needed.

Personal Instruction by the Sheikh

Because a murid or aspirant needs a guide, and there is not always such a person where one lives, the question arises "Can one benefit from a sheikh at a considerable distance?" The answer returned by the history of Sufism is that while it is necessary to travel and sit with and listen to one's sheikh, much of his intent can be gathered from his words, no matter how they reach one. This is apparent by the thousands of letters written over the ages to disciples by masters like Ibn al-'Arīf, Sharaf al-Din Maneri, Ibn 'Abbad al-Rundi, Ibn al-'Arabi, Imam 'Abdullah al-Haddad, al-'Arabi al-Darqawi, Ahmad al-Sirhindi, and many others. Letters are not written to someone who is present. Rather, the disciple would visit the sheikh, stay for a period, take the *nur* or light of his teaching back home to apply, and follow up with him in subsequent years.

When I asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman in my first year for permission to come and live in Damascus, he said, "Only if you can find work." I did not find any, but went back to Jordan, and would visit him in Syria sometimes only a few times a year, though I did record my conversations with him, and had his servant Abu Munir record his public lessons. Similarly, my wife would visit her sheikh Hajji Baba at most once a year. Each of us would come and listen, ask questions, and when we returned home, try to realize the answers in our lives, striving to keep the company of the best people where we were. Through these means Allah gave us what benefit had been destined for us.

Too, disciples vary in their level of both *himma* or spiritual ambition, and *adab* or good manners: indeed the two are possessed by many in inverse proportion. In keeping the company of the sheikh, those with high adab and low himma often benefit more from continuous contact, since buoyed up by his himma, they can establish their daily practice and accomplish their Sufi

work. Those with high himma and low adab generally benefit most at a distance, because there they can do their work, and when present on infrequent visits, their adab tends not to show, until the way itself teaches them good adab in later years.

Some living in far lands believe that if only they could live by the sheikh, all their problems would be solved. Hatim al-Asamm used to warn:

> Do not be deluded by a righteous place, for in paradise, Adam met with what he met with. Nor by an abundance of good deeds, for Satan, after his prolonged worship, met with what he met with. Nor by copious knowledge, for Balaam knew the Supreme Name [through which any prayer is answered], yet met with what he met with. Nor the company of the righteous, for none was greater than the Last of the Messengers (Allah bless him and give him peace), yet many people did not benefit from meeting him, even of his own kin (*al-Kawakib al-durriyya* [72], 2.590).

Although travelling to acquire Sacred Knowledge has been praised in Prophetic hadith, the *suhba* or spiritual companionship of the sheikh can benefit any murid whom his *mudhakara* or Sufi teaching directly reaches, even at a distance. Some who live far from the sheikh are among his closest disciples, while others who live nearby become remote. To go to the yearly Suhbas or assemblies where the sheikh travels and teaches murids for a few days can have more benefit than hearing him day after day where he lives. The *'inaya* or divine concern that brings superlative benefit to a particular murid is in the hands of Allah, and not confined to those who have the means to travel, or who live around the sheikh. I heard Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman admiringly compare one murid's listening to his words to how a dove imbibes water, plunging its beak beneath the surface. Many murids who come to the Suhbas absorb them this way. Conversely, many brethren who lived in Damascus and sat with the sheikh regularly knew little more of him than that he was the oldest of them.

With the exception of the few with very refined adab and much spiritual intuition in the sheikh—those like Abu Kamil with

Sheikh al-Hashimi, Sheikh 'Adel with Sheikh al-Kurdi, or Abu Munir with Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman—it is probably better for most people not to live around the sheikh indefinitely, for familiarity may breed contempt. The sheikh used to remark, "Closeness is a veil." How many an aspirant moved next to a sheikh to be a murid, and ended by becoming a neighbor! Many people grow stale when not spurred by the shortness of their stay or imminence of their departure to seriously absorb the teaching. As Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman would say, "Those in least need of the sheikh are his family and neighbors."

Yet the best way to take knowledge of Sufism is still the traditional way of *mudhakara:* sitting with the sheikh, listening, asking questions, and applying the knowledge. General instruction given by the sheikh in talks or writings should be followed, while details applicable to one's particular circumstances may be discussed with him in private, where any advice takes precedence over the more general lessons. Someone with a question troubling him about his path who will not ask the sheikh has turned his face from the door and walked into the wall. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to say that the path rejects three types of people: the haughty, the too shy, and someone who looks all about. None asks the sheikh.

When one can sit with the sheikh, whether alone or with others, one should take advantage of the opportunity and ask one's questions. If one cannot, recordings of teaching sessions are a valuable substitute. Often people have a question, and they listen to a recording "at random" as it were, and by the *baraka* (spiritual grace) of the tariqa, Allah gives them the answer they need. Finally, Allah has made it possible in our times for those attending the weekly Latifiyya dhikr in their countries to hear the *mudhakara* given on Tuesday nights by the sheikh in the main zawiya.

One's Own Readings

Online resources are given in Appendix A at the end of this work, though it suffices here to warn seekers that English literature on Sufism is plagued with efforts by the unqualified to write about the field, among them a group of authors dedicated to the concept of the universal validity of all religions. Besides being a

fundamental falsehood against the high, pure way of Sufism, it negates the basic tenet of faith that Islam is the final religion which abrogates all previous religions. Their books are often as eloquent as dangerous, and one must know them for what they are, though we may at least infer how rare and precious the way of tariqa is from the number of highwaymen upon it to rob the unwary. The matter also points up the need for genuine Islamic knowledge, and the relevance of the traditional adage "If the *wali* [friend of Allah] does not know the entrances the Devil uses, the Devil will enter."

Readers who aspire to the reality of the path need not go beyond the books of its true sheikhs. These are generally of two complementary types, which interpenetrate and overlap, corresponding to two successive endeavors in Sufism: the journey *to* Allah, and the journey *in* Allah.

1. The journey *to* Allah is the sphere of *Tasawwuf 'amali* or practical Sufism, which consists in perfecting the expression of one's love for the Divine by freeing oneself from blameworthy traits and acquiring praiseworthy ones. Its literary counterpart is found in many manuals of Sufism such as Qushayri's famous *Risala*, Imam Ghazali's *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* [Revival of religion's sciences], Suhrawardi's *'Awarif al-ma'arif* [The godly gnostic knowledges], the books of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, and those of Imam al-Haddad. Their keynote is not literature, but rather *tahqiq* or realization, meaning to persist in successive approximations of the noble quality as *hal* or transient experience, until one becomes characterized by it as *maqam* or permanent attribute.

Such books are translatable into English, and the traveller reading something about the tariqa should mainly confine himself to them, as practical Sufism is the basis for all the rest of the path. The benefits of reading them include learning one's *din*, breaking bad habits, renewing one's striving, and absorbing something of the high ambition of those before us by reading about their spiritual works. Other than fiqh, however, one should not take daily wirds or other works from books, but rather from one's sheikh. Most of us need few books, because we already know what we have to do.

2. The second endeavor, the journey *in* Allah, is the sphere of *Tasawwuf dhawqi* or experiential Sufism, the knowledge of which, in some sense, *is* its practice. Among its first principles is that any who speak or write about it confine themselves to what they have personally experienced. The instructional benefit of books containing it, aside from encouragement to do what the authors have done, presumes that the reader has experienced something of what is being described. This in turn is the fruit of practical Sufism: leaving the wrong; successive annihilations of the self at the hands of a *murshid* or true guide; and folding up the physical and spiritual worlds to know at first hand what is beyond them. In other words, books of experiential Sufism only spend upon one's own experience *after* the heart has been opened.

But if this experience is a precondition for benefiting from such books, it in turn presupposes *'ilm* or Sacred Learning, since students can only take what their sheikh has, and only if his *kashf* or illuminatory perception corresponds to the traditional ontology ('ilm al-tawhid) of revelation will he be able to genuinely guide students to the Absolute. The path of true Sufism is extremely high, and the drop on either side is horrendous, extending as it does into infinity, for which reason many sheikhs confine themselves to practical Sufism, for they are answerable to Allah for the beliefs they have taught to those who follow them. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman taught that the *'ilm al-tawhid* of traditional Ash'ari works of tenets of faith, with its knowledge of what is possible, necessary, or impossible of Allah Most High, is the metaphysics of true Sufism. He often mentioned Imam Junayd's words "This knowledge of ours is built powerfully high with the Koran and sunna."

Few translations of experiential Sufism into English can be recommended as educational aids because so few deliver the author's intended meaning. An interpreter must be a spokesman, and as Ibn 'Ata Illah says, "whoever has permission to speak, his words are understood by those who hear them, and his allusions laid bare to them," while whoever lacks this permission must generally guess his way through expressions imperfectly understood, and often tends to obscure and confuse what he would elucidate.

But even if there were good translations, one does not become an Ibn al-'Arabi by reading Ibn al-'Arabi. To benefit from texts of experiential Sufism, one must be with a sheikh until one's heart is opened, or at least understand their meaning from someone on the same page as the author.

Orientalist Works

Works on Sufism by Orientalists can be recommended against without apology or reservation, for any analysis that subtracts the reality of God from the spiritual phenomena it seeks to explain will be little better than its premises; meaning absolutely worthless. Their Creator describes such people as so "deaf, dumb, and blind, that they comprehend not" (Koran 2:171). Now, a sane person finding a group of deaf, dumb, blind, and uncomprehending people on his doorstep would not let them in to shampoo his rugs, let alone teach him his *din*. So how should someone with a spiritual path?

The distortional factors in works of Orientalists range from basic incomprehension of the Divine, to ignorance of matters of fact, to thinly-veiled contempt for Allah and those He loves. For example, the verses by 'Abd al-Rahman al-Majdhub, a sheikh of our initiatic chain, about avoiding the dangers of ostentation in the path "Bury your secret in the earth, seventy fathoms down, / And leave all men in doubt [about you] until Resurrection Day" (*al-Futuhat al-Ilahiyya* [47], 1.46), move the celebrated Louis Massignon to say, "The enduring power of Islamic mysticism is not in the haughty, morose isolation in which Majdhub proclaims: 'Bury your secret in the earth, seventy cubits down, / And let all creatures moan until the Last Judgement'" (*Language of Islamic Mysticism* [70], 11), reading *yashku* (complain, as of illness ["moan"]) for *yashukku* (doubt)—which combines blindness to the whole point of the verses, deafness to their meter, and incomprehension of the eternal consequences of *ghiba* or slander against one of the *awliya* or friends of Allah. Fill the mind with this, and one will have to spend a long time shoveling it out, while others will have already reached their destination.

Books of the Shadhili Tariqa

The true literature of the tariqa is copious, though mostly in Arabic, and consists, first and foremost, of the mystic maxims of the second successor to Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, Ibn 'Ata Illah (Allah be well pleased with them), his *al-Hikam al-'Ata'iyya*, together with its many commentaries, among the best of which is the *Sharh Ibn 'Abbad* [Commentary of Ibn 'Abbad (al-Rundi)], which Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to recommend for those who had not yet entered the *khalwa* or solitary retreat; as well as the *Iqadh al-himam fi sharh al-Hikam* [The awakening of spiritual ambitions: a commentary on the *Maxims*], by Ibn 'Ajiba, which the sheikh would recommend after the khalwa, though it contains much valuable material, in his words, "for the person at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the spiritual way." From its inception, the Shadhili tariqa has been one of scholars and scholarship, and many excellent books exist in print by its long line of masters.

TO summarize, few books in Sufism are of benefit in the path but those of authorized sheikhs. It is more beneficial when they are from one's own spiritual line, preferably the more recent of them, the best being those exposited aloud in the lessons of one's own sheikh. Hearing is generally more beneficial than reading, and it is probably no accident that Jalal al-Din al-Rumi began his celebrated *Mathnawi* with the word "Listen."

CHAPTER SEVEN

METHOD

MASTERS have always emphasized that the tariqa, while grounded at every step in Islamic knowledge, is not concerned with words or books as such, but with spiritual sincerity, illuminating the heart with the love and knowledge of Allah that He bestows on those who follow the way of the prophets and purified ones in spiritual effort and *dhikr*. Because the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said, "Works are only according to intentions" (*Muslim* [74], 3.1515–16: 1907, 8), Sufis engaged in spiritual works have always taken care to devote their intention, their whole mind, heart, and being—to Allah Himself, the limitless immensity of His greatness, His majestic supremacy (kibriya), and the thanks that are due to Him—not to the divine reward for such acts, or other ends of the self. Allah Most High says, "So whoever longs to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness, and not associate with his Lord's worship anyone" (Koran 18:110).

The rewards for acts mentioned in Koran and hadith, according to the masters of the way, are bestowed by Allah to manifest His limitless generosity to His servants if and only if these acts are for Him alone; not when reward as such is the reason for performing them. It is not suitable for spiritual works in the path of sincerity to be primarily for self-interest, in this world or the next. Some scholars, such as Imam Ghazali in his *Minhaj al-'abidin*, have even held that to seek nothing beyond an act's reward nullifies its entire value with Allah. But the sounder position is that

Allah in His mercy and kindness may inspire such a servant to eliminate the defective intention by disclosing to him the reality of his own self; that Allah alone created it and its worship, and that He has a better right to be what is intended therein. Superior still is that the sole devotion to Allah, as an "intention," accompany only the beginning of the act, to be then superseded by one's "absence" from the work, solely beholding Allah in the heart, for Allah loves those who behold Him.

If these are the states of those at the end of the path, beginners, for their part, reach them by successive approximations, as a person after a long illness strengthens unused muscles by practicing walking a little farther each day, to be eventually able to walk as far as he wants.

There is little need to dwell on those who perform acts of worship out of habit, automatically, without having any particular intention in their hearts: they are neither worshipping Allah nor other than Him, and can expect little from their acts except to pass time. The intention to draw nearer to Allah must be part of one's works, and when it is, all acts become highly significant, as Allah has said, "Whoever works righteousness, man or woman, while believing, We shall certainly bestow them a life wondrous fair, and shall truly requite them their wage as if each deed were the best they ever did" (Koran 16:97), meaning that the finest deeds one ever managed to regularly do in this world become the level at which Allah accepts all the rest of one's deeds, no matter how originally deficient. So every single work one can do is a tremendous favor from Allah, and as Isma'il ibn Majid said, "Lack of concern for the command comes of lack of knowledge of the Commander."

Fast or Slow Progress and the Self (Nafs)

Sufi method is not a technique for "inner attainment," but an expression of one's slavehood to Allah. Feelings of entitlement, self-consequence, or "doing something for Allah so He does something for me" all have their place in this world, but that place is not Sufism. The traveller belongs to Allah, not himself. As Abu 'Ali al-Daqqaq said of the humility necessary, "This path is not

for anyone but people whom Allah has swept garbage piles with their souls."

When Allah wills, He shows Himself to the traveller in a comparatively short time, as He did with Ibn 'Ata Illah, Sheikh al-'Alawi, and Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman. And when He wills, it takes longer, as it did with such great mystics as Junayd, Rumi, and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dabbagh. This is not out of lack of generosity, but out of supreme largesse, for many people would be dismissive or forget their slavehood if they reached their goal without long patience and effort. The path involves deep changes at all levels, and full spiritual maturity and ripeness are probably oftener seen at fifty or sixty years of age than short of it.

For Allah to bestow spiritual experience all at once upon a soul that still *identifies* with its blameworthy traits, such as anger, pride, blaming others, discontent, grudges, stubbornness, ingratitude, cold-heartedness, or a sense of victimhood, rather than repenting from them, would only harm it. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to emphasize that the greatest baraka for most people lies in the longer tack, with its successes, setbacks, and gradual unfolding of light. Ibn 'Ata Illah has said:

> He knew that servants long to be shown the secret of His divine concern ('inaya) for those special to Him, so He said He "chooses for His mercy whomever He wills" [Koran 2:105]. And He knew that if He left them with but that, they would neglect spiritual works, relying on preeternity, so He said, "Truly the mercy of Allah is nigh to those who excel in goodness" [Koran 7:56] (*al-Hikam* [49], 151: 170).

So a true murid focuses on what he may *do*, his adoration of his Lord, and that is his progress. Otherwise, Allah often keeps the prideful waiting until they lose some. I cannot remember our sheikh ever ascribing *ma'rifa* to himself. As Abu Madyan said, "Whoever claims any state or station for himself is utterly remote from the paths of divinely gifted knowledge." This is because to do so would turn knowledge of Allah into something for this world and other people. The spiritual "enemies" of sincerity remain enemies, and *taqwa* or godfearingness means keeping

them at arm's length throughout one's life. The *nafs* or self is an obstacle to this. As Ibn 'Ata' al-Niffari said:

> The *nafs* is innately disposed to bad manners (su' al-adab), while the servant is commanded to always have good manners. Thus the *nafs* by its nature runs along the plain of disobedience, while the servant turns it back with all his might from its demands. So whoever gives it free rein is its partner in corruption (*al-Risala al-Qushayriyya* [84], 274).

The attributes of the unregenerate *nafs* are greed, selfishness, pride, and envy. Whoever sides with *me*, *myself*, and *I* and enjoys assertion and notice is thus far in its grip. It is alive and well when one is remembering when other people offended one. The traveller sublimates it by dhikr, humility to Allah, thinking of the fewness of our mortal days, low-profile spiritual works, the *muraqaba* lessons of the tariqa, and submitting to the sheikh. One is helped in this by sincere *istighfar* or asking Allah's forgiveness, and by not siding with it but always asking Allah's help against it.

"Asking Allah's help against it" means realizing that all sins begin in the *nafs* as a passing notion (khatra). If *taqwa* or godfearingness comes to one's aid, and one rejects the notion and repels it and says *A'udhu bi Llahi mina sh-Shaytani r-rajim* ("I take refuge in Allah from the execrable Devil") in disgust and loathing, one will remain safe from it. If there is no taqwa and one does nothing, it will presently return as a suggestion or temptation (waswasa). It will be harder, but if one rejects it and repels it, saying from one's heart the *ta'awwudh* just mentioned, it will leave. If there is no taqwa and one does not hate it or seek Allah's help against it or resist it, it will presently return as an idea (fikra) how to do it, what would happen if one did, and so forth. If one has taqwa and regrets it and rejects it, as is more difficult now, and says the *ta'awwudh*, one can still overcome it. If not, it will return the stronger as an intent ('azm), and finally as a full-blown impulse (hawa) to folly and disobedience. A *salik* or spiritual traveller must have this knowledge of the inception of thoughts (ma'rifa al-khawatir) to be able to kill snakelings before they become deadly serpents. Having taqwa here is like a healthy

immune system, or like the reflexes of a trained martial artist in parrying blows, for which the *muraqaba* lessons furnish the training. In its original Arabic sense, the word *taqwa* derives from "parrying." It is possible to sublimate the *nafs* through Allah's help. Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said:

> When you wish to battle the ego (nafs), judge it helpless in every single movement, smite it with fear at every passing thought (khatra), imprison it in the grasp of Allah wherever you are, and complain of its helplessness to Him whenever you fall heedless. For it is what none of you can subdue, while Allah wholly has it in His power. So if it becomes willingly subjugated to hand, it well befits all of you to remember the blessing of Allah and say, "Exalted beyond glory is He who has made even this tamely submissive to us; While never could we have brought it under rein; And verily to our Lord shall we return" [Koran 43:13–14] (*Durra al-asrar* [59], 91).

A Sufi always accuses himself and takes full responsibility for everything that happens to him. Those who side with the *nafs*, blame others, and need victimhood tend to fall away from the way. The distance of the path is to impose Allah's demands on oneself, not to impose the self's demands on Allah. One takes a sheikh and path to purify the self and complete its perfections, the greatest of which is to forget it. As Abu Madyan said, "Every ultimate spiritual reality (haqiqa) that does not efface all trace of the servant and his forms is not an ultimate spiritual reality."

Mujahada or Spiritual Struggle

The main work of the tariqa is to steadfastly perform all acts that are obligatory (fard) and the confirmed sunna (mu'akkada), to eat and live from a lawful income, and to eliminate every blameworthy trait and acquire every praiseworthy one, with the Sacred Law as one's guiding light.

The sphere of outward *mujahada* or spiritual struggle in our tariqa is that one first strive to eliminate all that is unlawful (haram) from one's life according to the standards of one's own

school of fiqh, and after this, to eliminate all that is offensive (makruh) in it. This is the foundation for all higher reaches of the path. If one succeeds at this, and the time and inclination to learn exist, one may go on to do the same with the other schools.

The sphere of inward *mujahada* consists in training the heart—by love, dhikr, and gratitude—as 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Dabbagh says,

> to be attached to the Real (al-Haqq) Most Glorious and Exalted; keeping ever at His door; taking refuge in Him with every motion and rest; fleeing from the moments of inattention that intersperse those with presence, and in short, disciplining oneself to hold ever fast to Allah Mighty and Majestic, and persisting therein—even if one is not engaged in a great deal of outward worship (*al-Ibriz* [56], 2.60).

Ours is thus not a way of hunger, thirst, and spiritual austerities, but of thankfulness to Allah and presence of heart. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said, "Verily, Allah is well pleased that the servant should eat a meal and praise Him for it, or take a drink and praise Him for it" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2095: 2734. S).

In accordance with the teachings of Islam, those of our tariqa do not smoke, use pictures, listen to music, or countenance the mixing of men and women other than for work, education, or other needed purpose: whenever and wherever possible, men sit with the men, out of view of women with the women. Sheikh al-Hashimi has said, "This path has nothing to do with those who sit with women."

A cardinal principle of the tariqa is *zuhd* or nonattachment to other than Allah. One should always leave what does not concern one in this life or the next. Our sheikh used to repeat two verses of poetry by Imam al-Humaydi

> The meeting of people will never give you
> Anything but gibberish of useless gossip.
> So diminish your meeting of people,
> Save to take knowledge or improve your condition.

Masters say, "Increase in the physical, and you will decrease in the spiritual," and this pertains to everything but what genuinely benefits one. This is why the salik shuns the din of hucksters, prefers clothing devoid of writing and trademarks, and avoids polluting his mind and heart with things that are mere *ghafla* or heedlessness of the Divine. Chapter 13 treats pastimes and entertainment as such. As Sheikh Yunus used to note of love of this world (dunya), "When it dominates, it takes captive."

This applies with special force to things such as advertising, entertainment, and especially the Internet. Someone serious about the tariqa unplugs from the computer except for work, research, buying and selling, instruction, or correspondence that benefits himself or other Muslims. One should print out the articles one reads. The computer is a tool, not a life, and even for compelling reasons, the salik should spend no more than five hours a day on it in total, less than two of which should be online, and no hours at all after nightfall. Exceptions may be made for earning a living, but one should ask Allah for a job that permits one to observe these limits. In a word, *suluk* or spiritual progress means finding in the Absolute what suffices from the limitary.

When one first takes the path, one begins a series of seven lessons in *muraqaba* or spiritual vigilance, the first of which is the "Forty Grand," consisting of forty days of performing all prayers on time and avoiding outbursts of anger. After one accomplishes forty days, the exercise remains in place for the rest of one's life, as it is in reality but the beginning of one's Sufism.

The subsequent lessons incorporate the "prayer of repentance" (salat al-tawba), from the rigorously authenticated hadith conveyed by both Abu Bakr and 'Ali (Allah be well pleased with them) that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "No man commits a sin, then makes ablution (wudu) and makes it well, then prays two rak'as [cycles of prayer] and asks forgiveness of Allah Mighty and Majestic, save that he is forgiven" (*Ahmad* [52], 1.2. 8). This sunna is practiced as long as one is alive, whether for each wrong committed, as is superior, or at least for the last wrong committed on that day, conjoined with a "general repentance" from all wrongs entirely, something which

Imam Laqqani says is "valid without specifying them individually, even when one knows them" (*Itḥaf al-murid* [67], 255). It is particularly useful to travellers in the spiritual way, which is one of continual repentance (tawba).

Repentance is, as Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman taught, "the very soul of all spiritual stations," and in this connection, it is noteworthy that one of the greatest benefits of taking the tariqa is that disciples take care to fulfill the rights that are obligatory upon them: giving Allah His due by making up any prescribed prayers missed since entering Islam; and giving others their due by paying off any debts and restoring anything wrongfully taken from them, whether before or after entering Islam. These are necessary to succeed in the path, and to meet Allah on the Last Day.

One should not entirely neglect any kind of spiritual work recommended by Sacred Law, for as Ibn 'Ata Illah notes, each type of work has a spiritual light proper to it, and whoever leaves it unperformed will lack that light. One may fast days that are sunna to fast, such as Mondays and Thursdays, the Day of 'Arafa, and so on, but the main emphasis of our way is not fasting, but rather dhikr, and learning Sacred Law and living it.

Because learning Arabic is necessary to gain sound Islamic knowledge, it too enters into the *mujahada* of our Shadhili path. Sheikhs often test disciples with something that represents a challenge, and in our tariqa it is learning Arabic. The benefits are many. First, the path of a Sufi is not a path at all, but the work of a lifetime, in which knowledge plays a key role. Because of the baraka of knowledge, at the end of the path one finds a world of difference between, say, a good-hearted soul who knows only the Fatiha and a few suras, and another who is conversant in Arabic and has cultivated himself and benefited from the recorded experience of centuries of previous masters. Moreover, the Arabic Koran *is* the Islamic revelation, and therefore the book *par excellence* of the Sufis. Great as the reward may be for reciting it without understanding, it is not like that of someone who recites it as it has been revealed and is changed by it to the very core of his being. As Allah says in Sura al-Zumar, "Are they equal, those who know and those who do not know?" (Koran 39:9).

Finally, a sheikh's purpose is not to gather an army of followers around himself, but to produce Sufis who can ultimately walk on their own two feet in the path, able themselves to distinguish truth from falsehood, whose *din* does not disappear when the sheikh does—all of which requires that they be close to the primary texts of the Koran and sunna.

To summarize the whole matter of *mujahada* in our path, the wali is someone whom Allah has made victorious over his four enemies: the ego (nafs), this world (dunya), stubborn folly (hawa), and the Devil. Because this victory generally entails spiritual struggle, the difference between the Shadhili path and others is not that it lacks all *mujahada*, which all paths must have; but rather in its attitude towards *mujahada*. In other tariqas, spiritual struggle and its resultant change are regarded as a means to reach Allah. In the Shadhili path, reaching Him itself is regarded as the greatest means to this change.

Change

The touchstone of the spiritual way is a heart occupied with nothing besides Allah, and its sign, in the words of Junayd, is "that Allah (al-Haqq) slays you from yourself and gives you life through Him"; that Allah, in the fullness of one's destiny, free one of all low traits and adorn one with high ones. The tariqa is not concerned with the possibility of this happening as a miraculous gift, all at once, but rather with the means that normally bring it about. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman always emphasized that the two strongest ones are *dhikr*, making remembrance of Allah, and *mudhakara*, learning traditional spiritual knowledge of the *din* or religion in its three pillars: Islam (shari'a), Iman ('aqida), and Ihsan (tariqa).

Operationally, one strives to attain the states of the Koran—explained in the famous hadith of 'Aisha (Allah be well pleased with her) as "the very character" of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) (*Ahmad* [52], 6.91: 24601. H)—first by hearing about, then living, and finally internalizing each trait as a permanent station (maqam). One needs high aspiration (himma) for this, though blind haste can deprive the path of spiritual blessing

(baraka), and ultimately success, since love and knowledge of Allah reach their perfection only in a balance between the faculties of the soul, without blameworthy extremes.

The Shadhili tariqa has never had any distinctive dress or apparel; initiation into the tariqa rather meant to *change*, much in the way described by the Sheikh al-Akbar, Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi, in his explanation of the conditions for donning the patched cloak (khirqa) of the Sufis:

> The conditions for this well-known garment resemble the mode manifested by Allah for covering one's shameful parts. One clothes the shame of lies in the raiment of truthfulness, the shame of faithlessness in the raiment of keeping one's word, the shame of treachery in the raiment of loyalty, the shame of showing-off in the raiment of sincerity to Allah, the shame of base character in the raiment of noble character, the shame of blameworthy traits in the raiment of praiseworthy ones; clothing every low attribute in the raiment of every high one, exchanging attachment to worldly means for the unity (tawhid) of relinquishing them, exchanging reliance upon things for reliance on Allah, and exchanging thanklessness of blessings for gratitude to the Bestower of them (*'Ali ibn Abi Talib* [35], 127).

In short, taking the tariqa means to transform the soul, the means for this being somewhat different in the Shadhili path from others. For there are perhaps two basic approaches to Sufism—considered as the knowledge of the Divine Entity, which it grasps through direct vision. The first, the way of many tariqas, consists of uprooting bad characteristics from the heart, one by one, and so eventually to become pure enough to behold the Divine Presence.

The second is the way of our masters, and consists of the sheikh initiating the disciple into the Divine Presence through the invocation of the Supreme Name, a means through which Allah may grant *ma'rifa* or direct knowledge of the Divine to the disciple, who in virtue of this knowledge then frees himself of low traits, one after another, but less by way of spiritual struggle

than out of gratitude before the majesty of God. Attaining *ma'rifa* in our tariqa is thus not a diploma certifying one is "finished," but rather one perfection of the way that is a key to others, in a sense, the *beginning* of the Shadhili path. It comes first as a sense of the sacredness of the way, then as an actual understanding in the khalwa, then as a state consolidated by afteryears of dhikr, then with the fullness of years and service to one's sheikh, and in a deeper way through his own baraka and *ma'rifa*, it becomes one's station, a sort of ecstasy of beholding all things through their Maker, which even if one tried to leave, would not leave one. As Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman once said, "One becomes of those of Presence." All are *ma'rifa*, but the last is more properly that of the *'arif* or knower of Allah as masters use the term. And its centrality to the *din* is emphasized by the well-known hadith about spiritual excellence (Ihsan) "It is to worship Allah as though you see Him" (*Muslim* [74], 1.37–38: 8. 8).

Here, the means of *seeing* is not the eye, which can only behold physical things like itself; nor yet the mind, which cannot transcend its own impressions to reach the Divine; but rather the *ruh* or spirit of a human being, the subtle faculty in each of us which is not bound by the limitations of the created universe. The food of this *ruh* is the remembrance of Allah.

The Work of the Path

Perhaps the best description of the method, certainly one of the most frequently cited among Sufis, is the hadith of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace)

> Allah Most High says: "Whoever is hostile to a friend (wali) of Mine I declare war against. My slave approaches Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory upon him, and My slave keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks. If he asks Me, I will surely give to him, and if he seeks refuge in Me, I will certainly protect him. I do

not hesitate from anything I shall do more than My hesitation at taking the soul of the believer who dislikes death; for I dislike displeasing him" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.131: 6502. S).

This hadith describes the means to spiritual realization in conformity with the teaching of the sheikhs of the path, who define a *Sufi* as "a man of religious learning (faqih) who practiced what he knew, so Allah bequeathed him knowledge of what he did not know." While people differ in their capacity both to learn the religion and to attain the consummate awareness of *tawhid* or unicity expressed in the above hadith, everyone who travels the Shadhili path must know the works needed to "practice what one knows." If one is great in them, one will be great in spiritual attainment, and if one is weak in them, one will be weak in spiritual attainment, unable to pass from transitory experiences (ahwal) to permanent realization (tahqiq).

These works fall into three categories: faith, practice, and character. Or one might say, knowing, doing, and being.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FAITH

HAT one must *know* in the tariqa is the eternal truths of divine revelation: the tenets of faith of orthodox Islam. They will be treated first, since they are necessary for the validity of anything else in one's religion.

The tariqa is a deepening of faith, a putting of things in their true perspective until eternal truths are more palpable than the transient world around one. According to Ibn al-'Arabi, the path may be described as "knowledge ('ilm) become perception ('ayn)"; or in the words of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, "Reflection (i'tibar) becoming stronger than eyesight." This knowledge includes:

Belief in Allah

One must know that Allah is one, without any co-sharer in His entity (dhat), attributes (sifat), actions (af'al), or rulings (ahkam). One must also know that "there is nothing whatsoever that is like unto Him" (Koran 42:11): His entity does not resemble anything, nor anything resemble Him. Created things, for example, are bound by time and space, while Allah is the Creator of time and space, and transcendently beyond them, for which reason He cannot be "in" any particular place, as anthropomorphists believe; or "everywhere," as some of the unlearned believe; or "nowhere," as atheists believe, meaning thereby to negate His existence: He is transcendently beyond all these descriptions, which apply to created things.

"Belief in Allah" also entails knowing that He has no co-sharer in any of His attributes. For example, the divine attribute of *Wujud* or Being belongs to Him alone. Nothing is, besides Allah and His attributes and His actions and His rulings. This is what is meant by the Sufi term *Wahdat al-Wujud* or Oneness of Being. It should be understood, not only to enlighten ignorant critics, but because it is the metaphysical counterpart of *ma'rifa* or knowledge of Allah that is a prime emphasis of the Shadhili tariqa.

Oneness of Being does not mean that the created universe is God, for God's Being is necessary (wajib al-wujud) while the universe's being is merely possible (ja'iz al-wujud), that is, subject to nonbeing, beginning, and ending, and it is impossible that one of these two orders of being could in any sense *be* the other; but rather, the created universe's act of being is derived from and subsumed by the divine act of creation, from which it has no ontic independence, and hence *is* only through the being of its Creator, the one true Being.

So *Wahdat al-Wujud* or Oneness of Being entails that nothing exists except Allah, His attributes, His actions, and His rulings, while created being, as manifest to us, cannot be identified with His entity or attributes but only with His actions and rulings: the world, as it were, is pure act, while Allah is pure Being. In short, our metaphysic is not pantheism, because the world is not Allah. Spinoza's definition in the *Ethica* of God as "simple substance" (*pantheism* properly speaking), has nothing to do with the experience of those who possess *ma'rifa*. Rather, the world's existence is *through* Allah, in Arabic *bi Llah*, the point under the Arabic letter *ba'* being both a point of ontic connection and a point of demarcation. The whole experiential training of the tariqa may be said to elucidate this point. The matter is between Lord (Rabb), and slave who *is* through Lord (abd bi Rabb). The feet of some of those who attempt to travel the high path of *ma'rifa*, particularly without a true sheikh, may slip on this point, and the fall is a long way down; for which reason the traveller must not be ignorant of a second tenet of faith:

Belief That All Besides Allah Is Contingent

It is plain that the material world which we see is not, according to the teachings of our tariqa, the entity (dhat) of Allah ("Allah Himself"), or a divine attribute, but rather is His creative act (khalq) and rulings (ahkam). In point of being, the created world may be said to have "two faces."

One face is towards Allah, in respect to which created things are "obliterated," absolutely indigent to Him, nothing in themselves, inseparably connected to His beginninglessly eternal attributes of knowledge, will, and power. As 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi puts it, they are "outwardly creation, inwardly command." For nothing that exists lacks a state of being, and no state exists that lacks a divine attribute that governs it and determines its *hukm* or ruling, meaning the reality of its case, "what" it really is. The rulings (ahkam) of Allah thus flow over created things, manifesting His attributes in them and determining their specific relations to others; for example, the ruling for this thing is that it is larger, the ruling for that thing is that it is smaller; the ruling for this man is that he is a believer (mu'min), the ruling for that is that he is an unbeliever (kafir); the ruling for this act is triumph in the next life, the ruling for that is ruin; and so on. The rulings of Allah govern and weigh all things, materially and spiritually, and when things are considered apart from them, nothing remains, not a single relation. That is, in and of themselves things are nothing. "Their substance (madda)," our sheikh would note, "is nothingness ('adam)," which also describes their temporal past, present, and future: what they were, what they are now (by their intrinsic poverty and total ontological dependence on another), and what they return to—all are pure exteriority from what really *is*. The Koran describes them in terms of this essential attribute as "perishing," in Arabic *halik*, an active participle that literally refers *to the present*, and only figuratively to the future: "Everything is perishing except His Countenance. His is the rule, and unto Him do you return" (Koran 28:88).

Their other "face" is towards us, as manifestation and appearance, in respect to which created things are affirmed (thabit) and temporal, for which reason all Muslims acknowledge that the

ruling for the world, "everything besides Allah," is that it is contingent and came into being after it did not previously exist. In other words, its ruling is that it is a slave, and Allah created it.

The distinction between the two aspects, expressed in the key aphorism of Ibn 'Ata Illah "Things are affirmed by His affirmation, obliterated through the soleness of His entity," is essential to understand why, in the *mushahada* or 'spiritual vision' of our tariqa, Allah alone is the Manifest (Dhahir) in the universe, while never identified with created things, which are only the sites of His manifestation (madhahir). Though essentially ecstatic, the above aphorism distinguishes the affirmation (thubut) which things possess from the Being (wujud) they do not. Those who follow the path must know the difference and acknowledge their ruling.

Belief in Allah's Angels

Angels are beings with bodies of light, honored servants who faithfully carry out Allah's commands and are capable of changing form to assume various noble appearances.

Our sheikhs do not give revealed truths like faith in angels symbolic interpretations differing from what ordinary Muslims have believed about them since the times of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). In this context, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, as Sheikh al-Hashimi before him, used to warn disciples not to adopt symbolic interpretations about realities of Islam and Iman (e.g. "Ablution (wudu) means such and such," or "The Kaaba means such and such"), which only increase one's distance from Allah, being but new forms for the mind, whereas the task is to pass beyond forms to the unicity of the Divine. This is the journey to Allah (sayr ila Llah), and our sheikh used to emphasize that to accomplish it, the traveller must turn from two things, or the door may remain closed.

The first is taking *rukhsa*s or legal dispensations in works. The way of tariqa is to follow one's own school of fiqh with *'azima* or strictness, as rulings are initially legislated before dispensations for special circumstances, unless there is genuine need for them.

The second is *ta'wil* or adopting particular figurative inter-

pretations for apparently metaphorical expressions of Koran and hadith (e.g. in Sura al-Anfal, "And you threw not when you threw, but Allah threw" (Koran 8:17)). Although figurative interpretations attested to by classical Arabic usage are a valid form of Islamic exegesis (even obligatory to teach ordinary Muslims in times when the *bid'a* or 'blameworthy innovation' of anthropomorphism has spread, as today), the way of the Sufis in general is a second form of exegesis: namely, *tafwid* or the simple 'deference' or acceptance of scriptural expressions as they have come, while acknowledging Allah's absolute transcendence beyond created things, and consigning the knowledge of what is really meant by such expressions to Allah—until Allah Himself lifts the veil from one. After this, a person does not need figurative interpretations, because the journey is no longer *to* Allah, but rather *in* Allah, meaning in the knowledge of Him, directly and experientially.

In point of Sufi symbolism, *al-Minah al-quddusiyya*, Sheikh al-'Alawi's commentary on Ibn 'Ashir's fiqh manual *al-Murshid al-mu'in*, and similar works which derive spiritual reflections (isharat) from details of fiqh or expressions of Koran and hadith, have not been written to furnish spiritual travellers with objective lists of "esoteric facts" or "symbols," to memorize and know and recite by heart. On the contrary, they are intended to direct the traveller's attention from every detail of his spiritual life and worship towards the One who alone is worshipped. Sheikh al-'Alawi says,

> The purpose of this commentary is to apprise the traveller to Allah to take his indications from everything, as mentioned above in the book's introduction; but also to imbue the person without previous exposure to Sufis or what they possess with a longing for their way (*al-Minah al-quddusiyya* [3], 252).

One should accordingly take such books as they are, as existing for *targhib*, to focus one's desire upon Allah, not to bury one's spiritual ambition under a welter of symbols.

In respect to angels, they are neither figurative nor, as modernists like 'Abduh have suggested, "natural forces, like mag-

netism," but are rather what the generality of Muslims have believed them to be from the outset of Islam, and so too, with the other realities of our faith. Though this may be perhaps less intellectually interesting to some, our way is one of realizing eternal truths, and the erasure of attachment to intellectual forms, rather than the reification of new ones.

Belief in Allah's Inspired Books

His Books are those that He revealed to His messengers, including the Torah (Tawrah), Evangel (Injil), Psalms (Zabur), and Koran. "That He revealed to His messengers" means the original revelations, not the remnant scriptures in the hands of non-Muslims today, which Allah, the One who revealed the Books, informs us have been textually corrupted at the hands of men (Koran 5:13–17). So in their present form, they are truth mixed with untruth, which is why the Koran has been revealed "confirming that which came before it of the scripture, and the final authority over it" (Koran 5:48), though the original Books were Allah's word, and everything they contained was the truth.

Belief in Allah's Messengers

Allah sent mankind and jinn His prophetic messengers (upon whom be peace), who were trustworthy, intelligent, truthful, and fully conveyed their messages. He protected them from sin, and from every physical trait unbecoming to them, though as human beings, they ate, drank, slept, and wed. They were the best of all created beings; and the highest of them was him whom Allah chose to be the final seal of prophethood, our prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace).

Though the Sacred Law of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) superseded all previously valid religious laws, it was identical with them in beliefs, such as *tawhid* or the Oneness of God, and so on, a fact that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) emphasized by saying, "Let none of you say I am superior to Jonah" (*Bukhari* [17], 4.193: 3412. S), for the illumination of the prophet Jonah's *tawhid* (upon him be peace)—under the darkness of the storm, the darkness of the sea, and the dark-

ness of the belly of the fish—was not less than the illumination of the Prophet's *sa.w.* at the zenith of his success as the spiritual leader of all Arabia (Allah bless him and give him peace). The light of their message was one, in which sense the Koran says, "We make no distinction between any of His messengers" (Koran 2:285), showing that previous religions were the same in beliefs, and though differing in provisions of works, and now abrogated by the final religion of Islam, were valid in their own times.

Other Religions in Our Times

Proofs from Koran and hadith that Islam is the final and only religion valid or acceptable to Allah now that He has sent the Prophet Muhammad with it (Allah bless him and give him peace) may be found in chapter 18 below. A simple logical proof will do here, and it is that "the universal truth of all religions," which some urge today against the finality of Islam, violates the principle of non-contradiction, that "a thing cannot be and not be at the same time."

Simply put, a thing either is or it is not. This principle, which Sir William Hamilton has called "the highest of all logical laws, in other words, the supreme law of thought" (*Metaphysics and Logic* [30], 2:308), is the basis for the logical tautology "If p implies both q and not-q, then not-p," a disproof known to logicians as *reductio ad absurdum*, or simply *reductio*.

Now if all religions were true, this would entail that all matters of faith that various religions adduce as religious truth are true. The proposition that "all religions are true" would be logically disproved by even a single example of an irreducible disagreement between two religions on a question of belief, since the "universal truth" of both would then entail both q and not-q.

An example of such a disagreement is that most Christians, including those of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and major Protestant denominations, hold the Nicene Creed, which asserts that Jesus Christ is "the only son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father" (*Encyclopedia Britannica* [30], 8:678). The

faith of Islam emphatically denies this of Jesus, insisting rather that "Christ son of Mary was nothing but a messenger, whom messengers have passed away before" (Koran 5:75), and of God that "He, God, is One; God is the Ultimate; He did not beget, nor was He begotten, nor is there any equal to Him" (112:1–4), hence "those have truly committed unbelief who say that God is Christ son of Mary" (5:72). The disagreement between the two religions about Jesus' divinity could not be more plain. Now, since our *p*, the universal truth of all religions, entails both *q*, the godhood of Jesus asserted by Christians in their Nicene Creed, and not-*q*, the denial of the godhood of Jesus asserted by Muslims in their Koran, the inescapable conclusion is not-*p*, that the "universal truth of all religions" is absurd, by a fairly straightforward *reductio*.

To adduce that the unity between religions is "transcendent," beyond forms and doctrines, and presumably beyond the principle of non-contradiction, adds nothing to the discussion but more fuzzy thinking. For if the question of whether or not Jesus Christ is God Himself is merely "exoteric" or unessential at a "transcendent" level, we have the right to ask, "To whom?" Certainly not to anyone who understands its centrality to either Christianity or Islam. If there is any transcendent belief concurred upon by all, it is that *whom* one is worshipping has everything to do with the truth of one's religion.

The examples could be multiplied. If Judaism and Islam were both true, for instance, it would entail that Jesus and Muhammad (upon them be blessings and peace) were simultaneously both prophets and non-prophets, which is absurd. And so forth. The principle of non-contradiction is not something that can be conjured away with ink and a metaphysical manner. Genuine doubt about a logical tautology is either from a lack of understanding or a lack of sense. Only one among mutually exclusive alternatives can be the truth, and in religion it is Islam.

Belief in the Last Day

Belief in the Last Day includes faith in the resurrection of the dead, their reckoning, the weighing of their good deeds against

their bad ones, their passing over the high, narrow bridge (sirat) that spans the hellfire, and that some will be put in hell out of justice, and some in paradise out of Allah's pure generosity. Disobedient believers (as opposed to unbelievers) will be taken out of the hellfire after being requited for their sins. The Imam of tenets of faith 'Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi records,

> The scholars of Ahl al-Sunna and all the previous righteous of the Muslim Community are in unanimous agreement (ijma') that paradise and hell are eternal, and that the bliss of the inhabitants of paradise and the torment of unbelievers in hell shall endure forever (*Usul al-din* [12], 238).

Imam Taqi al-Din al-Subki relates sixty Koranic verses proving the eternality of hell and forty proving the eternality of paradise, and that there is scholarly consensus (ijma') on this point, and on the fact that whoever denies it is an unbeliever (kafir) by scholarly consensus (*al-I'tibar* [96], 32). *Ijma'* or consensus is a decisive religious proof, and the eternality of paradise and hell is something every Muslim must believe.

Belief in Destiny, Its Good and Evil

Belief in destiny consists in knowing that what hit one was not going to miss, and what misses one was not going to hit. The question sometimes arises: Why then are people responsible, when Allah destines our acts and creates them?

From the point of view of ultimate verities, Allah is the "Creator of everything" (Koran 6:102). But from the point of view of human experience, first, Allah has given us moral imperatives; secondly, we have a will; and third, we find in ordinary life that we have to make up our minds about nearly everything we do before we can do it. As far as we can tell, our actions arise by free choice.

Allah has told us that we will be judged for these actions, that our eternal soul "has what it earns, and incurs what it commits" (Koran 2:286), indicating that though all actions are created, human *choice* has an exceptional status among these actions, and is a faculty genuinely possessed by the soul. The precise relation

between divine destiny and human choice, however, is not comprehended by us in all its particulars.

This is no reason in itself to doubt the existence of either destiny or human choice, for there are many things we do not know all the particulars of, but do not therefore doubt. If we survey the things immediately around us, for example, we find that our ignorance of most of them is much greater than our knowledge, yet this is unimportant for using them in our lives. From how the paper we write upon is manufactured, to the thousands of separate molecular reactions needed to produce incandescence in a simple candle, to the relation between our cellular biology and our most familiar companion, human consciousness—our typical ignorance of things does not prevent us from benefiting from them.

With destiny and human choice too, we know enough to benefit. We know that Allah is Master of everything that exists, and that events are His creation. But this does not prevent anyone from obeying Him and earning His good pleasure. We experience our own choices as free and uncompelled; and Allah will judge us from this human, experiential point of view—the context of obedience, sin, repentance, and forgiveness—not from a divine point of view of timeless destiny to which we have no access.

Allah's foreknowledge of our destiny may be likened, for comparison, to a teacher in a classroom full of students. He has been teaching them all year, and he knows the effort of each one and what each deserves, yet he gives them a final examination anyway, so they can see for themselves their achievement. No one has reason to complain after having been given a chance to determine their final grade.

Because of the way we experience things, no one has an excuse or case against God, when He has sent prophetic messengers telling us what He expects of us, given us ears with which to hear the message, and finally an intellect with which to choose our course in life. Like a host of other things we do not fully comprehend, we know enough about human choice, good, and evil to make successful decisions.

Finally, the hiddenness of destiny is not only a truth, but a

blessing. If people knew the full secret of their destiny in advance, good men would grow complacent, and bad men worse. That it remains a secret is a motive for excelling to the highest stations attainable, while knowing that matters have already been decided gives us strength and fortitude for what is beyond our power.

In travelling in the tariqa, it is essential to know that one's share of success in the path is a matter of destiny, as this allows one to be patient long enough for the medicines of the teachings and work of the way to take effect on the soul.

TO summarize the matter of personal convictions of faith, travellers must know what *'aqida* they will die upon and meet Allah, and it must conform to that of orthodox Sunni Islam. "Allah does not take an ignorant person as a wali," our sheikhs say. The way to God is an ascending path from the knowledge of Iman and shari'a, to applying it in tariqa, to the ultimate spiritual reality of *haqiqa*.

CHAPTER NINE

WIRDS

A DERVISH is seldom better than his daily works. These include not only one's adab or manners, such as silence from useless words, characterized by al-'Arabi al-Darqawi as "of the most important of your wirds and most preferred and excellent of them" (*al-Rasa'il al-Darqawiyya* [24], 219); and one's outward worship, such as prayer and fasting, but also works of the tongue such as reciting Koran, *du'a* or supplication, and most of all *dhikr*.

Dhikr is the means by which every aim of the tariqa is realized; in Sheikh al-'Alawi's words, "the cause of every good." To be sure, dhikr is but a seed, which must be sown in the soil of true intention, nurtured with the love of those beloved by Allah, watered by daily effort, and which yields its fruit through the baraka of the greater reality of the tariqa one has connected with rather than by one's own spiritual might and main. But effort there must be, and organizing one's time in *wird*s or 'regular spiritual works' is one of the greatest means for attaining continuous presence with Allah.

That is the aim, but one must apply one's *heart* to the dhikr to accomplish it. This means *nafs* control, by casting away all worldly thoughts, forms, and daydreams while doing one's *wird*s. One does this by addressing the Divine not with the brain—which is always a last resort in dhikr—but with heartfelt attitudes of gratitude, love, hope, fear, and the other high states of the

heart. If *tawhid* steals over one's consciousness during wirds of repeated formulas, and in the prayer itself according to Sha'rani and others, it is superior to turning over the individual meanings of the words in one's mind, for Allah Himself is the central focus of revelation. When one is reciting other, more thematic, forms of dhikr, such as the Koran or supplication (du'a), where conscious discourse plays an integral role in their alchemy on the heart, one should aspire to experience the Oneness of *tawhid* in the very multiplicity of their meanings. Much of oneness of heart in dhikr depends on the depth of one's *tawba* or repentance, simplifying one's life with *zuhd*, and the rest of the rule of the order (usul al-tariqa). This is the Sufi work.

One should prioritize one's works so that the most important of them are never missed. When exigencies occur—such as travel, illness, or out-of-town guests—and one does not have time for everything, one omits as many of those less imperative from the end of the list as needed to make room for the exigency. When it is over, one returns to the full list. By the baraka of one's intention to do them faithfully, even supererogatory works missed for a good reason are accepted by Allah, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has told us, "When the servant gets ill or travels, there is recorded for him the like of what he did while at home or well" (*Bukhari* [17], 4.70: 2996. S).

The following wirds are given in the priority order recommended to murids. Not everything mentioned first is superior in Sacred Law to that mentioned after it—though many are—but rather the order is merely a proven means when one misses some of the last-mentioned items to successfully return to them when time again exists, instead of losing them altogether. For the ultimate aim is to do as much as possible throughout one's life, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "See to what you are able to do; for by Allah, Allah does not get fed up until you do, and the most beloved of the religion to Him is what its owner continues upon" (*Bukhari* [17], 1.17: 43. S).

The Prescribed Prayer

The prescribed prayer is the supreme wird. The entire path, from

beginning to end, is to increase our presence of heart and experience of the Divine in the prayer. No one attains this but the *dhakir* or one who remembers Allah much, who is in love with the Adored, unattached to this world, and has taqwa in his heart. Without taqwa, as Imam Ghazali notes, dhikr is but mental words, without any power over the heart, and does not repel the Devil.

It is obligatory for all of us, Arab and non-Arab, to check our recital of the Fatiha with a trained *tajwid* teacher and perfect the parts that still need work. Most of us suffer from overconfidence in this matter, reciting the Fatiha as we first learned it, with the early pronunciation mistakes that have become habitual through years of use, though reciting it as it was revealed is a matter of *din*, and of central importance to the path.

Men should perform all the prescribed prayers with the group at the mosque, or if nothing else, then at least the dawn (subh) and nightfall ('isha) prayers. One of the greatest blessings of "practicing what one knows" lies in the expiation of sins and raising of spiritual degrees that accompany every step one takes to the mosque. If one misses praying at the mosque, one should pray at the first of the prayer's time, preferably in a group of at least one other person, if only one's wife. It is superior for women to pray at home.

It is obligatory to make up all prescribed prayers one has missed in the past, whether by omission or legal invalidity. Hanafis making up past obligatory prayers must also make up missed *witr* prayers (the last prayer of the night of three rak'as), as well as keep performing all *current* confirmed (mu'akkada) sunnas. Shafi'is making up prayers are required to do neither, but should rather substitute their make-ups in place of the confirmed sunnas they would otherwise be performing, for example, by making up a missed noon (dhuhr) prayer before or after the current noon prayer in place of its sunnas; though no one should ever omit the current witr prayer or the two sunna rak'as before the dawn (subh) prayer, as these are the most confirmed of all sunnas, and should never be missed.

Sunna Prayers

Next after the prescribed prayers in importance come the witr, obligatory for Hanafis, and confirmed sunnas associated with the prescribed prayers. The key importance of the *salat al-tawba* or prayer of repentance to the spiritual path has been mentioned above in chapter 7. One should also not omit two or more rak'as of *tahajjud* or night vigil prayer after sleeping at night sometime before dawn, though if one still has make-ups, it is best to do them at this time instead. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) tells us that in the last third of the night Allah says: "Who is there supplicating Me, that I may answer him; who is there asking Me, that I may give to him; who is there seeking My forgiveness, that I may forgive him?" (*Bukhari* [17], 2.66: 1145. 8). To rise then to express one's love, thanks, and repentance to Allah and ask for everything one wants in this world or the next is one of the greatest secrets of the spiritual path. When afraid of missing one's witr, *tahajjud*, or make-ups, on a journey or for some other reason, one should pray them before going to sleep. The *duha* or midmorning prayer is also one of the sunnas regularly performed by those with a spiritual path, as are the *salat al-haja* or prayer of need and *salat al-istikhara* or prayer of guidance-seeking when need for them arises. Wirds with rak'as in them are the most important not to miss.

Sunna Dhikrs After the Prayer

Full focus on Allah in the dhikrs performed after the prescribed prayers is essential, and should be diligently returned to, and not allowed to flag, until it becomes one's norm. Among the best is *Subhana Llah* thirty-three times, *al-Hamdu li Llah* thirty-three times, and *Allahu akbar* thirty-four times, all of which may also be performed before going to sleep at night. It is rigorously authenticated that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

> There are oft-repeated ones, that whoever says [or "does"] after every prescribed prayer shall never be disappointed: saying *Subhana Llah* ["Exalted is Allah's perfection beyond any comparison"] thirty-three times, *al-Hamdu li Llah* ["All

praise be to Allah"] thirty-three times, and *Allahu akbar* ["Allah is ever greatest"] thirty-four times (*Muslim* [74], 1.418: 596. S).

This dhikr is probably unique among personal supererogatory works in being, as al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd al-Salam notes, even superior to works that benefit others (*Fatawa* [99], 244–45), which are normally superior to those whose benefit is confined to the doer. One should not let a single word of them pass one's lips without also moving the *heart*, with admiration of Allah at *Subhana Llah*, love for Him at *al-Hamdu li Llah*, and bowing the mind before the limitlessness of His majesty at *Allahu akbar*. All tariqa members should say these directly after the prescribed prayer before the sunnas, except Hanafis, who say them after their sunnas. One should never omit this dhikr unless necessary between numerous make-up prayers to get them done. There are many other sunna dhikrs after the prayer, and one should do those of them one can spiritually focus on, for "an ant's weight of works of the heart is worth mountains of those of the body," though both are only perfected through practice, training, and effort.

The next three things below are equally imperative for progress in the spiritual path.

The General Wird

The *Wird al-'Amm* or General Litany is the main dhikr of the tariqa and the sign of one's connection with it. In it lie many blessings, particularly, our sheikh used to emphasize, if it is complemented by being mindful of Allah during the day whenever one buys or sells something. Among the wird's many blessings is that whoever takes it from a true sheikh and recites it with sincerity is protected from the calamities that descend upon those around him, helped from committing sins, shielded from harmful jinn, finds unlooked-for blessings from Allah in his life, and help from Him in his religion. It contains the secret of the tariqa.

It is recited every morning and evening. The best time in the morning is after the dawn prayer (subh), and in the evening, between sunset (maghrib) and nightfall ('isha) prayers. But if need be, it may be recited anytime in the morning from the first of the

time of dawn (fajr) until noon, and anytime in the evening from the coming of midafternoon ('asr) until dawn. If one joins the midafternoon prayer with the noon prayer at noontime while travelling, one should wait anyway to recite the wird until midafternoon, as the *time* is the criterion.

By having taken the tariqa, performing the wird has become like a vow (nadhr), and if one misses it, one should make it up, as with confirmed sunna (sunna mu'akkada) rak'as that are missed. One does not leave the tariqa by missing the wird out of laziness or other reason, but only by stopping it with the intention of leaving the tariqa. If one misses the wird many times, one may simply turn to Allah, and begin that day with the first one due, leaving the past ones behind. Abu Madyan used to say, "What you have missed can never [really] be made up, for the second time is different from the first [and thus has new things one should do in *it*]." The other wirds mentioned below are not necessary but merely recommended to make up if missed, though like the *Wird al-'Amm*, will not have much effect on the heart if not done faithfully.

If every good deed performed for Allah Most High is in the widest sense "dhikr," the way of remembrance for nearly all dhikrs in the Shadhili tariqa is with the tongue, spoken aloud, meaning at minimum an unvoiced whisper audible to the person saying it, without annoying others. Besides the *Zayn al-Anfas* or Fairest of Breaths, described below, ours is not a way of silent dhikr.

It is superior to have ablution (wudu) while saying the wird, since the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) disliked making dhikr without it, but not obligatory, as even someone in a state of major ritual impurity (janaba) or menstruation may recite these wirds. Such a person, if Shafi'i, must intend the Koranic verses therein as *dhikr*; not as Koran recital, which is unlawful for them under such circumstances if intended as Koran; while if Hanafi, may only recite them in the heart, unspoken. It is best to face the qibla while making dhikr, as it is the noblest of directions—and to turn face and hands toward the sky during supplications, as the sky is the qibla of supplicants. One should

sit during the wird where one will not be spoken to, though if interrupted by something, even if the break lasts for hours, one simply returns to the point at which one left off, and completes it. The other wirds and *hizbs* (a synonym for *wird*, but usually containing more supplications) below, however, particularly the *Hizb al-Kabir* or Grand Invocation, are recited consecutively, without interruption or talking to others in between. If using a *misbaha* or rosary is difficult, on the job, for example, one may simply estimate the time, and recite the approximate number of each phrase using one's watch.

The Gatherings of the Tariqa

Belonging to the tariqa means coming to the *majalis* or gatherings of dhikr and instruction established by the sheikh in one's area, be it the Latifiyya, *hadra* or public dhikr, or annual Suhba or 'Convocation' of tariqa members during his visits to various countries.

The Latifiyya is described below. The hadra is a dhikr made standing together in a group, with motion and breath in unison, to the singing of mystical poetry. It is discussed in the next chapter, which clarifies its place in Islamic law and its value for the *ruh*, particularly at the higher reaches of the path. The hadra is part of the tariqa, and whoever wants to travel the Shadhili path should either take the tariqa as it is—or leave it.

The benefits of the gatherings, if sometimes plainer at the end of the path, are many. One is that the baraka of the group is the true wind that fills the sails of the traveller, not his own motions. Our *din* itself is a *social* religion. Secondly, group dhikr is different in quality from that made alone, with no less salutary effect on the *ruh*. Third, the heart's food is *hikma* or wisdom, and if one never hears any, it dies, for which reason the *mudhakara* or Sufi teaching imparted at *majalis* is of the utmost importance. For all these reasons our sheikhs say, "Through gathering, listening, and wholeheartedly following, there is benefiting." Nothing comes of a disciple who thinks he has no need of the gatherings. Many travellers, ancient and modern, have erred in this and ended their path cut off from it whence they least expected.

If there is no gathering in one's area, one should recite the Latifiyya aloud with one's family or others, or alone. Tariqa members and nonmembers alike are welcome to the Latifiyya. We do not go to other sheikhs' lessons in Sufism, or other tariqas' dhikrs, except occasional shared annual events such as a *mawlid* or 'celebration of the Prophetic nativity' to which the general public is invited.

The Special Wird

The *Wird al-Khass* or Special Litany is the Supreme Name "Allah," without number or limit, termed "special" because it is methodically recited only by those the sheikh has put through the khalwa under his strict supervision.

Prior to this, if one has heard how to recite the Name from the sheikh, one may recite it sixty-six times a day, preferably just before one goes to bed at night. After one has done so without missing a single time for forty days, one may recite it a hundred times. The Name may not be recited more than this without the sheikh's permission until after the khalwa.

The Khalwa

Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to tell me that only a few of those who took the tariqa from him entered the khalwa, by no means all who asked, but only those the sheikh's spiritual intuition told him would benefit from it, given their state, time, and readiness.

There must be a consonance between the state of the murid and that of the sheikh. It is preferable that murids seeking to enter the khalwa have listened to the teachings for a few years, their life be fairly free of problems, and they first complete the seven lessons of *muraqaba*. I was present at Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman's *mudhakara* of the khalwa, as a participant or an interpreter for others, some eleven times in the 1980s and 1990s, and sometimes wrote down what he said afterwards. It changed over the years, and I finally realized that his words were secondary, merely a means to transfer his *hal* or 'state' of certitude to the listener. Through the sheikh's *hal* the person making dhikr would reach a degree of presence with the Divine otherwise unattainable. When

the person then left the khalwa and practiced the Name on his own, he would perhaps fall back to half, perhaps a third of the level attained with the sheikh. But by having been *shown* what the aim was, with perseverance in the dhikr in subsequent years and diligently practicing taqwa, Iman, and the other fundamentals of the path, he could reach that state again or surpass it, and finally consolidate it into a permanent station.

That is, a khalwa is great through its follow-up. If there is little concern, and little follow-up, the meanings fade until they become like a barely remembered dream. If there is great concern and great follow-up, the person becomes of "those of presence." This process is called *tahqiq al-fana* or realization of one's annihilation, and may take from eight to ten years of invoking the Name after the initial khalwa.

As mentioned above of other wirds, the jihad of the *dhakir* or person making dhikr in this period is to throw out all forms and thoughts that come to mind during the dhikr and focus on Allah alone—through the utter *tawhid* learned in the khalwa, as is more perfect, or through other high states of the heart towards Allah such as love, joy, wonder, devotion, gratitude, need, hope, dread, and so forth—not through the brain or its representations. One must cast aside all thoughts of "technique" and other straws the *nafs* may grasp at, and wash oneself and one's forms away in the Sea of Beginninglessness (Bahr al-Qidam). Allah alone is the Doer. As in the khalwa, the adab of the *dhakir* consists in dignity, reverence, serenity, love, and exalted purpose (himma). One may repeat the final few stages of the khalwa when first on one's own, but in time should be able to do without them during ordinary untroubled periods of life. Inexorable, regular dhikr, night after night and year after year, must happen and is indispensable in this period, making Allah one's sole aim and desire.

One should keep in touch with the sheikh during this period by personal visits once or twice a year, not only to ask any questions about one's dhikr or experiences of *tawhid*, but because the ongoing connection between the *hal* of the murshid and murid is vital to spiritual development. As Abul Hasan al-Shadhili told Abul 'Abbas al-Mursi, "I have not kept your company but that

you should become me, and I become you." The rule of our order (usul al-tariqa) set forth in chapter 16 and followed by sheikh and disciple alike, is the main reason the sheikh's *hal* of dhikr enters some murids' hearts more easily than others. For heart-knowledge cannot pass without a strong bond of religious outlook between teacher and student, as there was between the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and his main heirs among the *Sahaba* or Companions. Periods of spiritual dryness have to be borne with and lived out, but are always instructive as to what one should do more or less of during the daytime. Most have to do with practicing the rule. In any case the dhikr must proceed, spanning the years of one's *suluk* or spiritual travel. When this is done, and the purpose is one, and Allah wills, He will manifest His good pleasure in the dhikr and the *dhakir*. As Abu Muhammad al-Jariri said:

> Your invocation (dhikr) depends upon you, until your dhikr becomes conjoined with His dhikr. At that point will it be lifted up, and purified of any "reasons." For nothing originating in time (hadath) ever met with anything beginninglessly eternal (qidam), save it was reduced to nothingness, and the Origin remained, and the offshoots were gone, as though they had never been (*Tabaqat al-Sufiyya* [98], 263).

A murid once came to Sheikh al-Kurdi and complained that though he felt at a height when with the sheikh, he felt worldly and estranged when he went back to his family and village. The sheikh replied, "How strange that someone should have the key of happiness in his hand, then not use it!" referring to the Name, which after the khalwa is invoked as much as the murid wants.

People sometimes wonder, "Where does it say in the shari'a to make long hours of dhikr; and whence comes the dhikr of the Supreme Name?" The former question is answered by the verse "And make remembrance of Allah much, that haply you may succeed" (Koran 62:10) and other verses about dhikr, while it is not prohibited or limited by a single text. And the latter by "And invoke the Name of your Lord at morning and the day's end" (Koran 76:25), the Name of our Lord being *Allah*. Moreover,

the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "The final hour shall not arise until it is no longer said on earth: 'Allah, Allah'" (*Muslim* [74], 1.131: 148. 8). Finally, the traveller in the tariqa must realize that he is following a centuries-old, tried and proven method of reaching *ikhlas* or sincerity; and must know that the shari'a ruling for anything lawful which is a means is that of its end. The ultimate fruit of this way is being *with* the Divine—a sea without shore of the Divine Beauty, a sea without shore of the Divine Majesty, a sea without shore of the Divine Perfection—in a way as immediate, in the Prophetic phrase, "as though you see Him." Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman called this state the *fitra* or 'primordial nature of man.'

Sufis speak of the process of reclaiming this nature as *takhliya* or 'emptying oneself' of the unneeded, and *tahliya* or 'making oneself fair' with every perfection. The former is necessary for the latter. Ibn 'Ata Illah says:

> How should a heart be illumined whose mirror but reflects created things? Or how should it travel to Allah when manacled by its desires? Or how should it hope to enter the presence of Allah when unpurified from the stain of its forgetfulnesses? Or how should it hope to understand subtle secrets when it has not even repented of its wrongs? (*al-Hikam* [49], 15–16: 13).

In our times, if the *fitra* or primal human nature is further to reach and take back than before, it is because our nature has become sullied by man's own hand. The *ruh* has been supersaturated not only with the haram and offensive, but with the sensory, amplified by endless repetition through digital technology. The goal is the highest that can be imagined. It is real, and it is realizable. But only those who disentangle themselves from the web can reach it. Probably not all have the spiritual talent to do this. Darqawi wrote to a disciple:

> I have thought searchingly: Has anything prevented us from divinely bestowed gifts but what we have mentioned, of holding fast to our desires and exalting the position of our selves?—and by Allah, another obstacle appeared to me,

namely spiritual talent. For ultimate meanings do not usually come except to someone with great spiritual talent in his heart and a tremendous devotion to beholding the Being of his Lord. It is such a person that the meanings of the Being of his Lord come to, until they annihilate him in them from the delusion of there being anything besides. For that is what they do to someone perpetually devoted to them, as opposed to someone without any talent except for attaining knowledge alone, or attaining practice alone. Meanings do not come to such a person, nor would he exult in them, because his aspiration is turned away from the Being of his Lord; and Allah Most High provides for each servant according to his aspiration. Without a doubt, every one of mankind has as much of meanings as the ocean has of waves; but the sensory has overwhelmed them, taken their hearts and limbs, and not left them for the meanings; for it is the opposite of them, and two opposites do not coincide (*al-Rasa'il al-Darqawiyya* [24], 85–86).

After a disciple has finished the khalwa, he should recite the Name each night before bed to consolidate and deepen his spiritual meanings, particularly that of *fana* or annihilation. This is imperative, and no other time of the day will do, though there is no set amount beyond about five minutes; it might rather be three hours, or all night, as everyone knows his own need: "Rather, every human being clearly sees himself" (Koran 75:14). Such disciples are recommended to make dhikr for at least an hour before dawn in the winter and forty-five minutes in the summer, and a few times after each prescribed prayer, but the primary basis of the *Wird al-Khass* or Special Wird is that it is unconditional (mutlaq), without number or time. It is meant to be perpetual.

The Sheikh al-Akbar says:

Those who truly count among humanity are the perfected, no one else, and they are those whose dhikr is *Allah*, and who invoke nothing more within themselves. That is their dhikr, whether said to themselves, or whether audibly when

they are alone. As for in public, it is *La ilaha illa Llah* ("There is no god but Allah"), and then the other kinds of dhikr . . . (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* [48], 4.75).

At the end of the khalwa, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to say of the presence with Allah that the murid found within himself: "Put it in your prayer, your worship, your dealings, and in everything." The Great Wird of the tariqa is to be with Allah, either by absence from the self in *fana* or annihilation in Allah, or by presence of the self in *baqa* or subsistence through Allah. Abul Hasan al-Shadhili has said:

> Your returning the secret (sirr) to actual closeness to you is no different than extending it to actual distance from you, while there are only two attributes: that of annihilation (fana), and that of subsistence (baqa). So if you are in annihilation, there is neither closeness nor distance, no more than there is any connection or separation. And if you are in subsistence, you already know what He has said: "Then through Me does he hear, and through Me does he see" [*Bukhari* [17], 8.131: 6502. S] (*Durra al-asrar* [59], 93).

Particular divine names such as *Ya Hayy* ("O Ever-living") *Ya Jabbar* ("O Overmastering") and so forth, like the Supreme Name, require permission to recite, except in limited numbers of short duration. This is because each divine name carries a particular power, and the heart and mind of the disciple may not be prepared to handle an overload of this power, just as an electrical appliance is designed to handle only a certain type of current.

The *Wird al-Khass* should be accompanied by personal consultation with the sheikh and listening to the readings of his *mudhakara* in the *dhawqi* or experiential literature (or recordings) of the tariqa, for *fikr* or contemplation opens up the channels of the *ruh* through which the dhikr flows.

A Daily Portion of the Koran

Whoever wants a relationship with Allah should recite His Word, the Koran, interactively, the way of those with hearts, asking Him while reading for paradise and every noble matter mentioned,

and seeking refuge in Him from the hellfire and every base one; and striving therein to grasp what Allah is telling one in His own words, which are a "detailing of everything" (Koran 12:111).

Tariqa members recite the Koran this way from beginning to end, then begin over, and so on, rather than merely repeating the same suras every day. How much to recite daily depends on one's *tawfiq* or 'divinely given success' from Allah. Ibn 'Umar (Allah be well pleased with him) tells us: "The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, 'Recite the Koran in a month.' I told him, 'I find the strength for more,' and he said, 'Recite it in seven days: do not do more'" (*Bukhari* [17], 6.243: 5054. s). The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) thus initially recommended finishing the Koran once a month, which means about one *juz'* or thirtieth-part per day. Imam Nawawi mentions this in his *Kitab al-adhkar* [Book of dhikrs] but also that many of the early Muslims (salaf) used to finish the Koran in two months, meaning a half a *juz'* per day.

The covenant of the tariqa is only to recite the *Wird al-'Amm* or General Litany, but one's Koranic wird is also essential and should take precedence even over the *hizb*s or longer daily litanies of the tariqa that make up one's other wirds. The least is to read something of the Koran daily, "even," as the covenant says, "if only a little."

One should buy a reasonable word-by-word *tafsir* or Koranic exegesis like Suyuti and Mahalli's *al-Jalalayn* to look up difficult words and expressions. Finally, all who recite are obliged to learn the rules and application of *tajwid* from a qualified teacher.

Events of the Islamic Calendar

The *mawasim* or yearly events of worship specified by Sacred Law, recommended or obligatory, are observed by all in the tariqa. These include fasting the Day of 'Arafa when not on hajj, for example; praying the night of Layla al-Qadr in Ramadan; the sunnas connected with the Two Eids; and so on throughout the year. They are set out month by month in detail with the hadiths that relate to them in Imam Ibn Rajab's *Lata'if al-ma'arif* [58], and to a lesser extent in Imam Nawawi's *Adhkar*, and in books of

fiqh and hadith. One should always ask Allah before an upcoming act of worship such as fasting Ramadan or the six days of Shawwal just after it, to make it easy for one to accomplish, and to accept it from one through His mercy and grace.

Sunna Supplications and Dhikrs

There are ten dhikrs from the Koran and sunna, Sheikh al-Hashimi notes, that are obligatory for every Muslim to say once in his lifetime with the intention of fulfilling the obligation, and remain perpetually recommended by the Sacred Law thereafter: *A'udhu bi Llahi mina sh-Shaytani r-rajim* ("I take refuge in Allah from the execrable Devil"), *Bismi Llah* ("In the Name of Allah"), *al-Hamdu li Llah* ("All praise be to Allah"), *La ilaha illa Llah* ("There is no god but Allah"), *Subhana Llah* ("Exalted is Allah's perfection beyond any comparison"), *La hawla wa la quwwata illa bi Llah* ("There is no power or motion but through Allah"), *Allahu akbar* ("Allah is ever greatest"), *Astaghfiru Llah* ("I ask Allah's forgiveness"), and (both) the Blessings and Peace upon the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) (*Miftah al-janna* [41], 6). Disciples may recite these in wirds as large as they have the time for.

One should also breathe *ruh* into one's life with the sunna dhikrs that are said at daily events such as going out of the house, putting on one's clothes, entering the bathroom, and so on. The *Adhkar* [78] of Imam Nawawi is an excellent reference for these.

Non-Hadith Dhikrs and Supplications

People sometimes ask if one should not learn and use *all* the Prophetic dhikrs and supplications, and whether their being too many to do so does not show that there is no need for anything besides, presumably including the wirds of the tariqa.

Two things show that such sunna invocations were not intended by Allah to take the place of all others.

First, they are far too many to be said on a daily basis. A single collection of them, Tabarani's *Kitab al-du'a'* [Book of supplication], contains more than two thousand, the daily reciting of which (assuming one could memorize them) would leave no time

for anything else, and life would have to stop. Because Allah does not demand the impossible from His servants, something else must be meant; whether to give servants freshness and variety in their supplications, or to teach us that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), in the words of 'A'isha, "used to make dhikr at all of his times" (*Muslim* [74], 1.282: 373. S), or for some other divine wisdom.

Second, the Prophet himself (Allah bless him and give him peace) taught us that the sunna does not discourage *other* prayers and supplications, but rather they are *part* of the sunna, as is attested to by the rigorously authenticated hadith that Burayda (Allah be well pleased with him) said,

> I entered the mosque with the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) where a man was at prayer, supplicating: "O Allah, I ask You by the fact that I testify You are Allah, there is no god but You, the One, the Ultimate, who did not beget and was not begotten, and to whom none is equal," and the Prophet said (Allah bless him and give him peace), "By Him in whose hand is my soul, he has asked Allah by His greatest name, which if He is asked by it He gives, and if supplicated He answers" (*Ibn Hibban* [53], 3.174: 892. S).

This hadith shows that when the prophetic Companions made up their own supplications without previous instruction from the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), he did not merely tolerate it, but rather *encouraged* it with the highest degree of approbation and acceptance—thereby legislating in our shari'a until the end of time that supplications *other* than those he explicitly taught are recommended in a general sense as *part of the sunna.* Secondly, he intended (Allah bless him and give him peace) that they should be remembered and transmitted to others, as his emphatically praising the Companion's supplication above ensured that this supplication would be.

This is why the Companions, their students (tabi'in), and the Imams of both the outward (such as Shafi'i, Tabarani, and Sakhawi) and the inward (such as 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Abul

Hasan al-Shadhili, and Ahmad al-Rifa'i) composed their own supplications and litanies of dhikr and passed them on to Muslims after them, who have recited them from that day to this. Imam Nawawi, who compiled his much-beloved collection of 1,212 Prophetic hadiths of prayer and dhikr in *Kitab al-adhkar*, also composed and recited his own daily litany known today as *Hizb al-Imam al-Nawawi*. As a scholar and Muslim, he found it superior to do both, and this is also the way of our sheikhs.

Ulema such as 'Abdullah Mahfudh al-Haddad tell us that making a dhikr or a supplication at a certain time at one's own initiative does not become a *bid'a* or reprehensible innovation unless it competes against a specific sunna legislated for that time and place (*al-Sunna wa al-bid'a* [9], 197). For example, saying *Subhana Llah* forty times immediately after the last word of every call to prayer (adhan) would be a blameworthy bid'a because the Sacred Law calls for the Blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) at that time instead, after which one may say what one wishes.

Because *hizb*s like those mentioned in the following section have a basis in the sunna, it is praiseworthy to incorporate them into one's spiritual life, though they should not be allowed to compete with one's other responsibilities, daily Koran recital, or the hadith supplications and dhikrs that are said at daily events, and found in *Kitab al-adhkar* [78] and similar works.

Hizbs

The other wirds of the tariqa, some described below, are for those with the spiritual ambition (himma) and time, and one should only take on as much as one can do regularly. Some of the most well known of them have been written and vowelled in Arabic in *Awrad al-tariqa al-Shadhiliyya* [90], translated into English beside the Arabic texts as *Invocations of the Shadhili Order* [91]. They should be learned and said by heart, though may be first read from the Arabic for a few months to facilitate memorizing them. Around three *hizb*s are plenty for most people, in view of the other wirds mentioned above, and because a little bit with love and awe is better than a lot without them. The times suggested

for them are from previous masters of the tariqa, though unlike the General Wird, if one can only find some other time to regularly do them, one may. The emphasis is on steady, daily effort. As Imam Ghazali notes, buckets of water poured on a rock in a single moment will have little effect, but if dripped on it drop by drop, the water will eventually wear a hole right through. And so it is, he notes, with the effect of dhikr on the heart.

Hizb al-Bahr or 'The Litany of the Sea' is recited after the midafternoon prayer ('asr). Some read it at sunrise, at which time it possesses particular benefits, and it is also read whenever one is in particular need of something, in which case one makes one's intention at the words *wa sakhkhir lana hadha l-bahr* ("and subject to us this sea"). There is safety where it is recited. Like all of the *hizb*s of the tariqa, it should be memorized and recited from one's heart as if it were one's own words, with complete attention to whom one is addressing it. It is not a magic wand, but an expression of slavehood and poverty. In a general way, the purpose of these wirds is not only to train the heart in du'a but to eventually eliminate one's absentmindedness from Allah, and one must strive in them to have presence of heart. Though memorized, they are not rote.

Al-Hizb al-Kabir or 'The Grand Invocation,' sometimes called *Hizb al-Barr* or 'The Litany of the Land,' is one of the greatest legacies of Abul Hasan al-Shadhili (Allah be well pleased with him). He is reported to have said of it, "Whoever recites our invocation shall have what we do, and bear what we bear." He also said, "Whoever has it by heart is one of my disciples." Abul Hasan's successor Abul 'Abbas al-Mursi had his companions recite it after the dawn prayer. One does not speak to others while reciting it except out of necessity, as for example when returning someone's Salams or answering the words of the adhan. It is an extraordinary litany that in the words of Ibn 'Ayyad "contains a mighty secret in everything, which no one knows except Allah."

Hizb al-Nur or 'The Litany of Light' is read after nightfall prayer ('isha). It is related that Abul Hasan al-Shadhili was reciting this *hizb* when his illumination came.

Zayn al-Anfas or 'The Fairest of Breaths' conjoins dhikr with

breath, awakens the heart to Allah, and brings serenity. It takes but a few minutes and can be done once or twice a day, preferably before eating, in the morning and evening. It is recommended for anyone in the tariqa, especially those living in the West. A description of it is given in *muraqaba* Lesson Six, or available on request from the sheikh and his *muqaddam*s or assistants.

Al-Wadhifa or 'The Work' consists of the *Salat al-Mashishiyya*, a Blessing upon the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) attributed to Abul Hasan al-Shadhili's sheikh 'Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish, interspersed with beautiful dhikrs and prayers by Abul Mawahib al-Shadhili al-Tunisi. This *mazj* or 'mixture' ends at the words *wa 'adada kalimati Rabbina t-tammati l-mubarakat* ("and the number of perfect, blessed words of our Lord"); to which the second and last part of the *Wadhifa* is an addendum (dhayl) by the great Libyan sheikh Muhammad Dhafir al-Madani. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to recite the *Wadhifa* in its entirety, though he permitted us to omit the final *dhayl*. In content, the *Wadhifa* is among the most profound synopses of Sufi metaphysics that exist, though its special usages are often ecstatic in context and not easy to grasp, and it is well for those with questions to consult one of the many scholarly commentaries on it that explain its dimensions and its accord with orthodox Islam. Most recite it after the dawn (subh) prayer, though the brethren of Sheikh al-'Alawi, who seem to have used the *mazj* of the first half alone, used to recite it after both the dawn and sunset (maghrib) prayers. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman strongly recommended it for all disciples, and it is particularly powerful as an aid for those of the spiritual station of *baqa bi Llah* or 'subsistence through Allah' at the end of the path.

Al-Latifiyya or 'The Invocation of *Ya Latif* ("O Most Subtly Kind")' one thousand times, followed by the supplications and dhikrs that bring it to a close, is usually done in a group on Tuesday nights. It may be done by anyone in the tariqa, with anyone else (such as one's family), though disciples living in one area should take the sheikh's permission and gather for it if possible. Sheikh al-Kurdi used to relate that both those who recite it and the place where they are enter into the sphere of this divine name and its protection from troubles and afflictions. It may also be

recited by oneself after the *Wird al-'Amm* or General Litany, a practice strongly recommended during trials in one's life, in which case one begins with *A'udhu bi Llahi s-Sami'i l-'Alimi mina sh-Shaytani r-rajim* ("I take refuge in Allah the All-hearing, the All-knowing, from the execrable Devil") three times, then the last four verses of Sura al-Hashr (Koran 59:21–24), and then recites *Ya Latif* 129 times, before finishing it with the supplication normally used when it is recited in a group.

Hizb al-Nasr or 'The Litany of Triumph' is a supplication read for the victory of Muslims over non-Muslim foes. It is not permissible to recite it against particular Muslims, even if enemies, though one may recite it against one's enemies in general if one does not intend anyone specifically. It is recited after the mid-afternoon prayer, after the nightfall prayer ('isha), or at other times as needed.

Dala'il al-Khayrat or 'The Waymarks of Benefits' is the most celebrated manual of Blessings on the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in the history of the Umma. Millions of Muslims have recited it, copied it out, and found its baraka, goodness, and light since its composition in the ninth/fifteenth century by Imam Muhammad al-Jazuli, a sheikh of our tariqa with only six masters between him and Abul Hasan al-Shadhili. Whoever recites it experiences its baraka. One of the most palpable *karamat* or miraculous graces of the wali who composed it is the tremendous love for the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) which Allah imbues in the hearts of those who recite it devotedly. It is divided into eight *hizb*s, and many people finish it in a week, though anything one may read of it, even a few pages a day, is a blessing. Ladies in the tariqa during the days of their month when not reciting the Koran should read something of the *Dala'il al-Khayrat* to nourish and refresh their lives and hearts.

Many other wirds exist in the literature of the Shadhili tariqa, such as the powerful *Hizb* of Abul 'Abbas al-Mursi, the long and beautiful *Munajat* or 'Entreaties of the Divine' of Sheikh al-'Alawi, the *Munajat* of Ibn 'Ata Illah, or others. These are treasures of the dervishes, and whoever takes the tariqa is authorized to recite the wirds of any sheikh in our *silsila* or initiatic chain he

may wish, though of course there is baraka in consulting the sheikh, and one should avoid excesses, as a little that one can do always is better than a lot that dwindles to nothing.

Dhikrs other than those of the Koran and hadith or of the sheikhs of the tariqa, such as wirds found in Sufi books, those of the Bani 'Alawiyya or others, and so on, may be read once for the baraka, but are not adopted for daily use without the permission of the sheikh. Whoever takes the Shadhili path will find his own wirds of greater baraka. Finally, wirds for treating illnesses or solving other temporary problems may be used without the sheikh's permission for the limited periods in which they are needed, as they are more like medicines than wirds of a tariqa.

The Rights of the Body

The last of the wirds we shall mention is tending one's horse, meaning the physical body, which the soul rides to its final destinations. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman emphasized this to me more than once in the course of my path. A disciple, perhaps it was Sheikh 'Adel, once saw Sheikh al-Kurdi pick up a *ta'rifa*, the smallest, most inconsiderable coin in circulation, and then say that to leave it on the ground was *kufr bi ni'ma* or 'ingratitude for the divine blessing' of money. Health is worth more than wealth, and to make sure one is not cut off by ill health is a wird that directly enters into the works discussed in this chapter. 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As (Allah be well pleased with him) said:

> The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said to me, "Am I not told that you fast all day and pray all night?" and I replied, "Indeed, O Messenger of Allah." He said, "Then don't. Fast, but also leave it; pray, but also sleep. For verily your body has a right over you, your eye has a right over you, your spouse has a right over you, and your guest has a right over you. Verily it suffices you to fast three days a month, for you are rewarded for each good deed ten the like of it, so to do only that is to perpetually fast" (*Bukhari* [17], 2.51: 1975. S).

The naming of these things as *rights* means they are a part of

the spiritual path, and that one's health is a trust (amana) from Allah. The way of *wilaya* or sanctity is a lifetime trajectory, in which health and longevity play a role, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) indicated when asked "Who is the best of men?" by answering, "He whose life is long and works are good" (*Ahmad* [52], 4.188: 17680. S), and saying in another hadith, "The believer who is strong is better and more beloved to Allah than the believer who is weak, while there is good in each" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2052: 2664. S). For someone plagued by illness cannot under most circumstances worship Allah or benefit others like someone who is strong and healthy. Few can look at the biographies of the Sahaba and the early Muslims, scholars, and Sufis without being impressed by the length of most of their lives—in an age without antibiotics, surgery, anesthesia, vitamins, or even knowing that microbes cause disease. What they did have was the Koran and the sunna; and their sparing way of life and fulfilling the rights of the body enter into the rule of this tariqa.

Peace of Heart

First, their certitude in Allah from constant supplication, dhikr, worship, and *taqwa* or godfearingness filled their hearts with deep peace. Such peace brings about well-being, health, and longevity in the body, just as ill feelings bring about physical and spiritual malaise. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Truly there is a morsel of flesh in the body which if sound, the whole body is sound; and if unsound, the whole body is unsound. Truly it is the heart" (*Bukhari* [17], 1.20: 52. S). This hadith, which begins, "The lawful is plain indeed, and the unlawful is plain indeed," is about shunning the haram or what even resembles the haram, and its import is that human happiness, physically and spiritually, lies in being sure that one is in the good pleasure of one's Lord. By this is the remembrance of Allah effective, and Allah tells us, "Verily, only through the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace" (Koran 13:28).

Food and Drink

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) taught us: "No

man ever filled a vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for a human being to eat a few bites that keep his back upright. But if need be, then a third for his food, a third for his drink, and a third for him left to breathe" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.391: 2537. S). This does not refer to exact quantities, but to the general abstemiousness in eating that best promotes health, meaning no more than one actually needs to fulfill all one's obligations completely without either weakness from hunger or distraction by food from what is more important in life. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, who used to mention this hadith when we were eating, invariably said *Bismi Llahi r-Rahmani r-Rahim* ("In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate") with presence of heart before eating, *al-Hamdu li Llahi Rabbi l-'Alamin* ("All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds of Beings") afterwards, and though he enjoyed his food and was grateful for it, ate sparingly.

Hunger is the best sauce for food. Junayd said, "Baraka descends upon this group in three places: when they are eating, for they eat out of real need (fāqa); when they are being taught, for they discuss the states of the prophets and the spiritual stations of the great-faithed ones (siddiqun); and when they are in *sama'* [listening to melodious recital of Koran or mystical poetry], for they hear with ecstasy, beholding the Abidingly Real (al-Haqq)."

It was typical of previous Sufis that they often experienced hunger, not perpetual satiety, and regarded it as an energizing help in their religion. They ate simple, uncomposite foods, and seldom ate elaborately cooked dishes. As a rule, they had but one kind of food to eat at a setting, or at most a few kinds of thing. Meat was not an everyday food, but an occasion. Water was their usual drink. Their meals were short, lives were long, and until their advanced old age they remained largely free of the degenerative diseases widespread today. Confirming the Prophetic hadith above, present research has shown that excessive weight, particularly in the *visceral fat* inside the body cavity that produces a noticeable belly, is linked to a host of diseases. Those discovered so far include: diabetes, heart disease, sleep apnea, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, gallstones, gastrointestinal disease, terminal cirrhosis, ovarian cystic disease, insulin resistance, breast cancer,

colon cancer, esophagus cancer, kidney cancer, uterus cancer, gallbladder cancer, liver cancer, pancreas cancer, and prostate cancer. Clearly, digging one's grave with a spoon is not *taqwa*.

If one is overweight, the cure is simple: determine how much food one usually eats, especially of calorie-rich main dishes, reduce it by one-third, and for a set number of weeks, eat that much instead until one's weight goes down. One should drink mainly water, eat only at meals, give desserts a miss, and if one needs more food, add as much as one wants of extra steamed vegetables to fill oneself up. One will be hungry. One must continue to weigh oneself once a week on a scale to make sure one's weight is going down and not coming back. If it doesn't go down, one is kidding oneself. Health and ideal weight are nearly synonymous, and Ibn Rajab hardly exaggerated when he said of the above Prophetic hadith of "a third" for one's food, "This hadith is a comprehensive axiom that comprises all fundamentals of medicine" (*Jami' al-'ulum* [57], 2.468). The best table of optimal weight I have seen is the one issued by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in 1959. They simply counted who lived and who died. Tables published later permit people to be fatter, but the extra weight increases one's risk.

Exercise

The worship of earlier generations of pious Muslims, their comings and goings to the mosque and the marketplace, occupations in gaining a living, drawing water, cooking, carrying their own needs by hand, and their travels riding and on foot gave most of them a great deal more daily exercise than someone today would get even by exercising several times a day. The expenditure of hard bodily effort is another lost longevity secret that can only benefit the person who regularly does it. When intended to strengthen oneself for the worship of Allah, in it lies felicity of body, mind, and heart.

Sleep

As for sleep, the coming of nightfall meant for all previous generations of Muslims that life wound down. Allah says, "It is He

who has made you the night to repose in, and the daytime clear-sighted: Verily in that are many wondrous signs for a people who hearken" (Koran 10:67). 'A'isha said that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) "used to go to sleep at the first of the night, and rise to pray at the end of it" (*Ahmad* [52], 6.102: 24706. S). Research today has established that first, lack of sleep is a major cause of premature aging, bad health, and poor memory; and that second, in the words of one scientist, "light is a *drug*" which profoundly affects the hormonal and neurologic regulation of the body's many systems. Staying awake through the night ruins the health, and even a single night of missed sleep lowers the blood's count of frontline immune-defense cells by a full one-third. The body, mind, and nerves simply function best when one is awake during the day and asleep during the night. "And verily your eye has a right over you." If one drops off to sleep during the day whenever one sits quietly for a few minutes, it is a sign one is not getting enough sleep. Needs vary, but longevity studies suggest that to regularly get less than five and a half hours or more than seven and a half hours of sleep shortens one's life span. A brief afternoon nap is a sunna. Certainly, if one misses the dawn prayer (subh), or even the night vigil prayer (tahajjud), something is wrong.

IN summary, wirds are a matter of discernment. Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said, "The discerning is not he who puts off the veil from the eyes of his heart: the discerning is he who comprehends the meaning of being given existence; that He has not made him exist except for His worship, or created him except for His service." And according to Abu 'Abdullah al-Maghribi, "The best of spiritual works is making one's moments thrive with deeds that accord with the divine good pleasure."

CHAPTER TEN

THE HADRA

A PERSON coming to the Muslim heartlands to learn something about the tariqa is likely, at some point in his visit, to see the brethren in the *hadra* or public dhikr as it has been traditionally practiced by generations of Shadhilis in North Africa under such sheikhs as al-'Arabi al-Darqawi, Muhammad al-Buzidi, and Ahmad al-'Alawi, and by Sheikh Muhammad ibn Yallas and others after him in Damascus from the beginning of the last century.

As one enters the mosque, circles of men are seen making dhikr (women participants are screened from view upstairs) standing and holding hands, now slightly bowing in unison, now moving up and down with their knees in unison, the rows rising and falling, breathing in unison, while certain of them alternate at pacing around their midst, conducting the tempo of the group's motion and breathing with their arms and step. Singers near the sheikh, in solo or chorus, deliver mystical odes to the rhythm of the group: high spiritual poetry from masters like Ibn al-Farid, Sheikh Ahmad al-'Alawi, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Himsi, and our own sheikh.

Though a very stirring experience, it is meticulously timed and controlled, and as with all group dhikrs, the main adab is harmony. No one should stand out in any way, but rather all subordinate their movement, breathing, and dhikr to that of the group. The purpose is to forget one's individuality in the collective sea of spirits making dhikr in unison. Individual motives, thoughts,

and preoccupations are momentarily put aside by means of the Sacred Dance, moving together as one, sublimating and transcending the limitary and personal through the timelessness of rhythm, conjoined with the melody of voices singing spiritual meanings.

It is an experience that joins those travelling towards Allah spiritually, socially, and emotionally. Few forget it, and visitors from the West to whom it is unfamiliar sometimes wonder if it is a bid'a, as it was not done in the time of the earliest Muslims, or whether it is unlawful (haram) or offensive (makruh); and why they see the ulema and righteous attending it in Damascus, Jerusalem, Aden, Cairo, Tripoli, Tunis, Fez, and wherever there are people of the path.

I was one of those who asked our sheikh about the relation of the hadra to the shari'a which is the guiding light of our tariqa. As Muslims, our submission to the law is total, and there are no thoughts or opinions after legally answering the question "Does the hadra conform with orthodox Islam?" Because it comprises a number of various elements, such as gathering together for the remembrance of Allah (dhikr), singing, and dancing, we should reflect for a moment on some general considerations about the Islamic shari'a before discussing each of these separately.

Sacred Law

First, the Islamic shari'a furnishes a comprehensive criterion for all possible human actions, whether done before or never done before. It classifies actions into five categories: the *obligatory* (wajib), whose performance is rewarded by Allah in the next life and whose nonperformance is punished; the *recommended* (mandub), whose performance is rewarded but whose nonperformance is not punished; the *permissible* (mubah), whose performance is not rewarded and whose nonperformance is not punished; the *offensive* (makruh), whose nonperformance is rewarded but whose performance is not punished; and the *unlawful* (haram), whose nonperformance is rewarded and whose performance is punished.

Now, Allah in His wisdom has made the vast majority of human actions permissible. He says in Sura al-Baqara, "It is He

who has created everything on earth for you" (Koran 2:29), which establishes the shari'a principle that all things are *mubah* or permissible for us until Allah indicates that they are otherwise. Because of this, the fact that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) did not do this or that particular practice does *not* prove that it is offensive or unlawful, but only that it is not *obligatory*.

This is why when shari'a scholars speak of bid'a, they do not merely mean an "innovation" or something that was never done before, which is the *lexical* sense of the word, but rather a "blameworthy innovation" or something new that no legal evidence in Sacred Law attests to the validity of, which is the *shari'a* sense of the word. The latter is the bid'a of misguidance referred to in the hadith "The worst of matters are those that are new, and every innovation (bid'a) is misguidance" (*Muslim* [74], 2.592: 867.s), which, although general in wording, scholars say refers specifically to new matters that entail something offensive or unlawful. Imam Shafi'i explains:

> New matters are of two kinds: something newly begun that contravenes the Koran, sunna, the position of early Muslims, or consensus of scholars (ijma'): such innovation is misguidance. And something newly inaugurated of the good in which there is no contravention of any of these, and is therefore something which although new, is not blameworthy. For when 'Umar (Allah be well pleased with him) saw the [tarawih] prayer being performed [in a group by Muslims at the mosque] in Ramadan, he said, "What a good innovation (bid'a) this is!" meaning something newly begun that had not been done before. And though in fact it had, this does not negate the legal considerations just advanced [i.e. that it furnishes an example of something that 'Umar, who was a scholar of the Sahaba, praised as a "good innovation" despite his belief that it had not been done before, because it did not contravene the broad principles of the Koran or sunna] (*Siyar al-nubala'* [26], 10.70).

Gatherings of Dhikr

As for the practice of Muslims gathering together for group dhikr, there is much evidence of its praiseworthiness in the sunna—aside from the many Koranic verses and the hadiths establishing the general merit of dhikr in every state—such as the hadith related by Bukhari

> Truly, Allah has angels going about the ways, looking for people of dhikr, and when they find a group of men invoking Allah, they call to one another, "Come to what you have been looking for!" and they circle around them with their wings up to the sky of this world.
>
> Then their Lord asks them, though He knows better than they, "What do My servants say?" And they reply, "They say, *Subhana Llah* ["Exalted is Allah's perfection beyond any comparison"], *Allahu akbar* ["Allah is ever greatest"], and *al-Hamdu li Llah* ["All praise be to Allah"], and they extol Your glory."
>
> He says, "Have they seen Me?" And they answer, "No, by Allah, they have not seen You." And He says, "How would it be, had they seen Me?" And they say, "If they had seen You, they would have worshipped You even more, glorified You more, and exalted You even more."
>
> He asks them, "What do they ask of Me?" And one replies, "They ask You paradise." He says, "Have they seen it?" And they say, "No, by Allah, my Lord, they have not seen it." And He says, "How would it be, had they seen it?" And they say, "If they had seen it, they would have been more avid for it, sought it more, and been more desirous of it."
>
> Then He asks them, "From what do they seek refuge?" And they answer, "From hell." He says, "Have they seen it?" And they say, "No, by Allah, they have not seen it." And He says, "How would it be, had they seen it?" And they say, "If they had seen it, they would have fled from it even more, and been more fearful of it."
>
> He says, "I charge all of you to bear witness that I have

> forgiven them." Then one of the angels says, "So-and-so is among them, though he is not one of them, but only came for something he needed." And Allah replies, "They are companions through whom no one who keeps their company shall meet perdition" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.107–8: 6408. 8).

The last line of this hadith shows the highest approval for gatherings of dhikr in the religion of Islam. Some other accounts—all of them weak (da'if), none of them having a contiguous chain of narrators—transmit the condemnation of Ibn Mas'ud (Allah be well pleased with him) for gathering together to say *Subhana Llah* ["Exalted is Allah's perfection beyond any comparison"], but even if these accounts were authenticated, which they are not, the above hadith of Bukhari, containing the explicit approval of such gatherings by Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) suffices us from needing the permission of anyone else. Further, the explicit mention of the various forms of dhikr in the hadith suffices in reply to certain contemporary "reformers" of Islam, who attempt to reduce "sessions of dhikr" to educational gatherings alone, by quoting the words of 'Ata' (ibn Abi Rabah, Mufti of Mecca, d. 114/732), who reportedly said, "Sessions of dhikr are the sessions of [teaching people] the lawful and unlawful; how you buy, sell, pray, fast, wed, divorce, make the pilgrimage, and the like" (*al-Majmu'* [79], 1.21).

Perhaps 'Ata' intended to inform people that teaching and learning shari'a are *also* a form of "dhikr," but in any case it is clear from the Prophet's explicit words (Allah bless him and give him peace) in the above hadith that "sessions of dhikr" cannot be limited to teaching and learning Sacred Law alone, but fundamentally and primarily means gatherings of Muslims to invoke Allah in dhikr.

Dancing and Sacred Law

As for dancing, Imam Ahmad relates from Anas (Allah be well pleased with him), with a chain of transmission all of whose narrators are those of Bukhari except Hammad ibn Salama, who is one of the narrators of Muslim, that

> Ethiopians danced in front of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace), dancing and saying [in their language], "Muhammad is a righteous servant." The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "What are they saying?" And they said, "Muhammad is a righteous servant" (*Ahmad* [52], 3.152: 12540. S).

Other versions of the hadith clarify that this took place in the *mosque* in Medina, but in any event, the fact that dancing was done in front of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) establishes that it is *mubah* or permissible in the shari'a, for had it been otherwise, he would have been obliged to condemn it. For this reason, Imam Nawawi says:

> Dancing is not unlawful, unless it is languid, like the movements of the effeminate. And it is permissible to speak and to sing poetry, unless it satirizes someone, is obscene, or alludes to a particular woman (*Minhaj al-talibin* [80], 152).

This is a binding legal text for the permissibility of both dancing and singing poetry, from the central legal work of the Shafi'i school. Islamic scholars point out that if something which is permissible, such as singing poetry or dancing, is conjoined with something that is recommended, such as dhikr or gathering to make dhikr, the result of this conjoining will not be offensive (makruh) or unlawful (haram). Imam Jalal al-Din Suyuti was asked for a fatwa concerning "a group of Sufis who had gathered for a session of dhikr," and he replied:

> How can one condemn making dhikr while standing, or standing while making dhikr, when Allah Most High says, "Those who invoke Allah standing, sitting, and upon their sides" [Koran 3:191]? And 'A'isha (Allah be well pleased with her) said, "The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) used to invoke Allah at all of his times" [*Muslim* [74], 1.282: 373. S]. And if dancing is added to this standing, it may not be condemned, as it is of the joy of spiritual vision and ecstasy, and the hadith exists that Ja'far ibn Abi Talib danced in front of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him

peace) when the Prophet told him, "You resemble me in looks and in character" [*Ahmad* [52], 1.108: 857. H], dancing from the happiness he felt from being thus addressed, and the Prophet did not condemn him for doing so, this being a basis for the legal acceptability of the Sufis dancing from the joy of the ecstasies they experience (*al-Hawi li al-fatawi* [100], 2.234).

Now, Suyuti was a hadith master (*hafidh*, someone with at least 100,000 hadiths by memory) and a recognized mujtahid Imam who authored hundreds of works in the shari'a sciences, and his formal opinion, together with the previously cited ruling of Imam Nawawi in the *Minhaj al-talibin*, constitutes an authoritative legal text (nass) in the Shafi'i school establishing that circles of dhikr which comprise the singing of spiritual poetry and dancing are neither offensive (makruh) nor unlawful (haram)—unless associated with other unlawful factors such as listening to musical instruments or the mixing of men and women—but rather are permissible; and if they conduce to remembrance of Allah, recommended.

None of the authoritative books of the Shafi'i school consider the hadra blameworthy, and some of its main scholars, Imams like Suyuti and Bulqini, praise its religious merit. There are principal scholars from other schools who concur with them. The Hanafi Imam Khayr al-Din al-Ramli wrote an extensive fatwa in support of it in his *al-Fatawa al-Khayriyya*, a work often cited in Imam Ibn 'Abidin's *Radd al-muhtar*; the latter considered by many the foremost fiqh resource in the Hanafi school. And Ibn 'Abidin himself supports it by quoting a *qasida* or poetic ode celebrating it (*Radd al-muhtar* [43], 3.308). Sheikh 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi, a Hanafi scholar who is always cited in Ibn 'Abidin's work with the title *Sayyidi* ("my master") before his name, wrote a book in favor of the hadra, as did the Moroccan Maliki scholar Muhammad 'Abd al-Kabir al-Kattani.

One finds a difference of opinion about it among Malikis not under the rubric of the hadra as such, but rather of *sama'* or 'audition,' listening to poetry being sung or Koran recited in a beautiful voice. An example is found in *al-Sharh al-saghir*, a book cited

to me at the Islamic Research Academy of al-Azhar in Cairo as a foremost reference for fatwa in the Maliki school. The text is by Imam Ahmad al-Dardir, while the commentary printed under it is by Sheikh Ahmad al-Sawi, who, when expositing Dardir's text on the prohibition of musical instruments in the second volume, touches on some related issues with the words

> Al-Suhrawardi says, "Whoever condemns *sama'* is either ignorant of sunnas [since the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) sang as he helped dig the trench with his Companions before the Battle of the Confederates (*Bukhari* [17], 5.137: 4099. S)] and accounts of the Companions [like that in which 'Umar ibn al-Khattab heard and approved of Hassan ibn Thabit singing his poetry in the mosque in Medina, and asked Abu Hurayra (Allah be well pleased with all of them) if he remembered the time the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had told Hassan, "Reply [to foes with poetry] in defense of me"; and Abu Hurayra said, "By Allah, yes!" (*Muslim* [74], 4.1932: 2485. S)]; or else deluded by what he himself is debarred from, of the states of the righteous; or else so dry of heart and devoid of spiritual taste that he persists in condemnation. . . ." [A paragraph on musical instruments follows, after which al-Sawi continues:] As for dancing, scholars differ about it, some adopting the view that it is offensive (makruh), others holding that it is permissible, while others hold there is a distinction between those with spiritual states and others, it being permissible for those with spiritual states but offensive for anyone else. And this is the most acceptable position, and held by the majority of scholars who rule for the permissibility of listening to singing, and is the position of Sufi masters (*al-Sharh al-saghir* [22], 2.503).

The "most acceptable position," mentioned in this Maliki work, that it is "permissible to those with spiritual states (ahwal) but offensive for anyone else," is similar to a restriction cited by Ibn 'Abidin after the *qasida* or poetic ode mentioned above, saying that

> the dispensation in such cases of dhikr and *sama'* is for the knowers of Allah, who devote their times to the best of spiritual works, who are travelling the mystic path, in firm command of themselves to refrain from low states, and who do not listen in audition except to the Divine, or long for any besides Him . . . (*Radd al-muhtar* [43], 3.308).

Because the ruling for *means* in Sacred Law is that of their ends, the rulings in these two schools applying to "those with spiritual states" may well also apply to those travelling the path under their training in such means to reach their states.

Yet in the end, a difference of legal opinion about something among the four schools of Sunni law means it is permissible for the ordinary Muslim to do. And when such a thing directly enters into the spiritual training of one's path, as with the hadra, what all who follow that path believe is that the sheikhs and awliya of their tariqa *correctly* regarded it as a means of closeness to Allah, and that the shari'a scholars who considered it otherwise, though they have a reward for their *ijtihad* or juridical reasoning, were simply incorrect.

The Hadra and Spiritual States

One may wonder what role the hadra plays in the *tarbiya* or spiritual training of Sufism. Lexically, *tarbiya* means bringing something from imperfection by gradual degrees to its full perfection, and one may note that Sufism as religious knowledge is not a collection of facts, but rather acquiring states of the heart, such as love of Allah, serenity in His dhikr, nonattachment to anything besides Him, acceptance of destiny, love of His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace), and other states that the Islamic revelation has indicated are perfections.

Now, a Sufi's knowledge of whether something is lawful or unlawful is a matter for the faqih or scholar of jurisprudence. But it is equally true that a faqih's knowledge of the spiritual path is a matter for the sheikhs of Sufism. As the Maliki scholar and Sufi Ahmad Zarruq says in his *Rules of Sufism:*

> The knowledge of anything may only be taken from those who possess it. So a Sufi is not to be relied upon in jurisprudence unless his mastery of it is known. Nor is a scholar of jurisprudence to be relied upon in Sufism unless his realization of it is known. Nor yet is a hadith scholar to be relied upon in either unless he is competent in them. Thus the seeker in the path of Sufism must take knowledge of Sacred Law from scholars of jurisprudence; but he turns to those realized in tariqa in what concerns bettering his inner self regarding it [jurisprudence] or other matters (*Qawa'id al-Tasawwuf* [105], 36).

In other words, there are different specializations within the sciences of Islam, and those who have not mastered them are not authorities on them. In the case of tariqa, *which* spiritual medicines should be used is up to the sheikh who is giving the *tarbiya* to bring the state of the disciple to its desired completion. These medicines may include anything that is permissible or recommended; after being sure to perform the obligatory, and avoid the unlawful.

If something is differed upon among jurists, then if it is not considered praiseworthy in one's own school of jurisprudence (as the *mubah* or 'merely permissible' is not, for example), it is normally left aside; unless the sheikh considers it to enter directly into a disciple's spiritual regimen. Doing something differed upon by scholars is not by that fact alone blameworthy, first, because those who hold it to be praiseworthy may be right, especially when their evidence is stronger; and secondly, according to scholars, the mujtahid in error also has a reward from Allah, as do those who follow him.

But there is another reason for considering it unblameworthy which is properly connected with Sufism rather than jurisprudence, namely that a disciple only takes a sheikh because he believes that by following him he will gain more than he has now. To tread the path of Sufism is to follow the guidance of a sheikh. To be sure, it is a purely voluntary association which may be ended by either the sheikh or murid. And it does not mean obedience in matters that are unequivocally unlawful or offensive.

But in matters of the path, one must listen to one's sheikh. A patient who can cure himself has no need of a doctor.

Performing the Hadra

The focus of the hadra is dhikr. Allah has sent down the entire divine revelation unto mankind, and called it nothing other than the *remembrance* (dhikr) in a number of verses of the Koran. The reverberation of this remembrance from the hearts of mankind is our religion, adoration, and experiential knowledge of the Divine. Allah says, "And the remembrance of Allah is by far greatest" (Koran 29:45), which Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid, and others among the earliest exegetes explained as meaning "Allah's remembrance of man is supremely greater than man's remembrance of Allah."

In the hadra we collectively reflect this remembrance back to the Divine. Here, as with the Supreme Name and the *Wird al-'Amm*, the best way is to leave one's thoughts and perceptions aside, and throw one's entirety into the dhikr—remembering Allah with the highest states the heart can summon: hope, wonder, longing, admiration, joy, fear, dread, awe, adoration, gratitude, love, and other existential attitudes towards the Divine that lie at the periphery of human experience. These are the key to the knowledge of the Divine, which is heart-knowledge, and not mind-knowledge. Allah can only be approached with the heart because He is out of the reach of the mind, save from behind the veil of metaphor or description.

The outward experience of the hadra is thus not rational, thematic, or idea-orientated *per se*, but rather at the deeper level of breathing, rhythm, unicity, moving together as one, the song of mystical poetry, and melody. The focus of the participant is Allah and nothing besides: for beginners, by the heart-states just mentioned; and for those further on, by these same states, while beholding everything with the eye of Oneness.

The Adab of Participants

One should show proper gratitude to Allah for group dhikr by arriving before, so as not to interrupt the hadra by joining the

circle late. Men should wear traditional Eastern clothing and a cap on their heads in the zawiya, and women in their section wear a proper Islamic hijab. When everyone begins, one joins hands with the person next to one, right hand of each person over left of the other person, the circle unbroken so as not to leave room for the Devil to enter. One should keep eyes closed during the dhikr except to synchronize one's motions with the cadence of the singers, who furnish the rhythm with their *qasida*s. The tempos change, and the singers should be carefully observed to keep the pace right. One keeps time with one's breathing, from the deepest part of the chest, focusing one's being on Allah alone. Just as a fine abrasive is used to polish the surface of a gem, rhythm is used to polish the mirror of the heart so it reflects the Divine. Of the adab of the hadra is to spend of one's *hal* upon those present by throwing everything one has into it; those wrapped up in their own thoughts and concerns have little dhikr or *hal* to spend on others. One casts all worldly thoughts from the heart so nothing remains but the Beloved.

The motions of the outward body are two. The first is used in the first and third of the hadra's main segments. It is easily learned on the spot, and consists in bowing forward from the waist, keeping one's head and neck fairly straight, legs upright, and arms and hands unbent and relaxed in the hands of those beside one. Everyone keeps the tempo by returning to standing upright at each *downbeat*—the main beat of the melody—and then bowing forward on the offbeat, the unaccented note of the melody. As in ordinary life, the dervish is *up* at every downbeat. Like all motions of the hadra, it is dignified and virile, not languid.

The second motion is used in the second and fourth of the hadra's main parts. It consists in standing and making a slight up-and-down movement of the body by bending the knees and straightening them up. Here, as before, the back and neck are aligned, head is upright, and the hands at one's side are relaxed with arms straight. The movement, like that of the *ruh*, is purely vertical.

Along with these movements, the dhikr is softly brought up

from the deepest part of the chest, and is sometimes "Allah," sometimes only "Ah," and sometimes a doubled catch in the breathing, in unison with others. The aim is to still the voice of the *nafs* by sublimating the whole attention, through synchronous rhythm, towards Allah alone. If the dhikr is somewhat ungrammatical, it is certainly effective in focusing the heart on the Divine. In our tariqa, it is termed the *dhikr al-sadri* or chest dhikr, and it is done only in the hadra. It should never accelerate faster and faster on the part of the participants, but remain measured and regular with the cadence of the singers. At the end of the hadra it increases in strength, but should never become frenetic or exceed the tempo at which the *qasida*s are being delivered. Some err in this.

The *nuqaba* or 'leaders' who set the pace of the dhikr by walking within the circle should closely observe the tempo set by the singers, and both they and the other participants should change pace when the tempo quickens and when it slows. The singers should choose the *qasida*s whose words and rhythms are most moving and which emphasize the Divine Oneness, rather than those which praise the Prophetic traits, which should normally be more seldom sung, as the primary focus of the hadra is *tawhid*.

One should never enter or leave the hadra after it has begun except for the most pressing reason, but if one must, then not by walking across the middle of the circle, but rather from the side. Leaving to get a drink of water or make a phone call is far from any adab. Some visitors occasionally imagine that the hadra is "doing one's own thing," or crying out, or shouting—all of which contradict the spirit of the hadra, which is to forget oneself in the group dhikr. Such people should be told to return to proper adab, or if they cannot, be shown out to where they can sit by themselves.

When the sheikh finishes the dhikr, everyone should be seated to listen to the lesson. Here, people close their eyes for a moment to listen to whoever can recite the Koran most beautifully, after which the lesson is given. Unless there is a health reason or extreme fatigue, it is better adab to sit upright in front of the sheikh rather than leaning against the cushions around the walls, though

those who have brought their children should sit with them in the back. The lesson is followed by a supplication, and then everyone stands to shake and kiss hands in turn with the sheikh and all the assembled dervishes.

The Fruits of the Hadra

The fruits of the hadra are many, and we may mention a few here.

First, it is a group dhikr, and as such is an act of worship, which if done with ikhlas is a means for pleasing Allah. This is shown by the many rigorously authenticated hadiths mentioned in *Sahih al-Bukhari* and elsewhere about the spiritual merit of gatherings of dhikr.

Secondly, it is a tremendous means of baraka. In my own life, more than once in the 1980s I used to wonder whether going downtown on Saturday nights to the hadra was really the best thing to do, since I was trying to finish the *Reliance* as soon as possible. I asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, "Wouldn't working on Sacred Learning at home be better than going down to the hadra?" After all, I reasoned, working on a book might fulfill a communal obligation (fard kifaya), and how could the hadra compare with that? He said: "No Sidi, you have to stand with the men." He added that when one misses the gatherings, the things one is trying to save time for seldom happen either.

The tariqa's main hadra in Damascus has taken place at Nur al-Din al-Shahid mosque every Friday afternoon for nearly a century, and there are people who have been attending for twenty, thirty, sixty years. People whose "religious phase" did not stop at youth, or middle age, but increased with every year, and for many, continues to grow. To understand the baraka of the hadra, one has but to look at their lives. Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil attended it for four decades. As mentioned above, I found him a transformed person, and he regarded the path as the way to become one, and the hadra as a part of it. He was not alone in this, but rather many succeeded in perfecting themselves in the path as he did. The hadra and the brotherhood it generated were a means for the remarkable longitudinal dimension of their religious lives and attainment.

Third, the mystical poetry sung in the hadra is of extraordinary power and beauty, moving hearers from remembrance of Allah to gratitude, from gratitude to love, and from love to raptness in the Divine. These too are among the spiritual states alluded to above by Suyuti, Sawi, and Ibn 'Abidin in their discussions of *sama'*. Even for those still learning Arabic who do not understand the poetry, the rhythm of everyone invoking together as one person lifts the heart above its preoccupations with, say, having a car to fix, groceries to buy, a garage to clean, a boss to deal with, and many other things that bind people's hearts to the earth when they try to make dhikr. Few of those who attend the hadra after sunset prayer (maghrib) then go to the nightfall prayer ('isha) could be oblivious to the difference between the two prayers: *maghrib* is *maghrib*, but *'isha* is something else.

Fourthly, in many places the awliya attend the hadra, outwardly indistinguishable from ordinary people. A single look, word, or prayer from such a person can alter one's whole life, and one never be the same again. This is something experienced to the present day.

Fifth, the end of the path to Allah is knowledge (ma'rifa) of Him, but as He is, not as we are. Now, He is eternal while we are in time. His eternity is not a mere succession of moments, but a transcendence of time, in which all moments are present at once. His beginninglessness therein is identical with His endlessness.

Allah says, "We shall without fail show them Our signs in all of the far-flung directions, and in their very selves, until it becomes utterly plain to them that it is the Truth" (Koran 41:53). The cadence of breathing and dhikr in unison by those in the hadra, in its timeless synchrony, is a sign pointing the human soul beyond linear time to Eternity, a vast sea of infinity. As it is the nature of the infinite to disclose the paltriness of the limitary, it is a powerful stimulus to leave the ignoble and trivial aspects of one's own character and actions, and to ascend.

Finally, the state that results from the dhikr makes it easy for hearts to absorb the admonitions and indications of the masters, not only in the readings from their works that follow the hadra, but in the *qasida*s that accompany it. The latter represent

years of spiritual effort by the awliya who composed them crystallized into a matter of a few words, an experiential legacy that fills and transforms the hearts of whoever has the aptitude to inherit it.

Ijtihad in Spiritual Medicines

The above are a few of the reasons why our sheikhs prescribe the hadra as part of the Shadhili *tarbiya*. Those who go to it over the years and decades experience them, and the effect vouches for the correctness of the prescription in the contemporary world.

If it is true that it did not exist at the first of Islam, and that "we do not need anything besides the Koran and sunna," it is yet *trivially* true, because everyone knows this and nobody denies it. Rather, the point is that the era of the first Muslims was a *foundational* stage, establishing the broad outlines of the Sacred Law to set the criteria for what was to be accepted and what was to be rejected of *new* matters until the end of time.

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) himself said: "Whoever Allah wishes well, He gives knowledge of religion: I am but an apportioner, and it is Allah who gives; this Community will remain steadfast upon the command of Allah, unharmed by any who oppose it, until Allah brings His [final] command" (*Bukhari* [17], 1.27–28: 71. 8).

Now, the Prophet's saying (Allah bless him and give him peace), "I am but an apportioner, and it is Allah who gives" in the context of religious knowledge shows that Allah may well give a particular scholar understanding or knowledge that, while conforming to the broad outlines of the Prophetic apportionment, no other scholar has ever been previously given. Examples are innumerable, and familiar to anyone who has studied something of the multitude of hadith commentaries, Koranic exegeses, works of jurisprudence, mystical treatises, and the other works that make up the scholarly heritage of Islam, with the result—attested to by fourteen centuries of history—that "this Community will remain steadfast upon the command of Allah, unharmed by any who oppose it, until Allah brings His [final] command."

The point is that there must also be *ijtihad* or 'qualified expert

conclusions' on the part of scholars of the *heart*, the Sufi sheikhs, when, like their counterparts in the outward sciences, they find circumstances that did not exist in the time of the early Muslims which require Islamic solutions. Ihsan is about states of the heart, and our hearts are not like theirs.

How much irrelevant, superfluous information did early Muslims have to wade through each day? How many distressing news stories of no conceivable benefit to anyone were thrust upon their consciousness; how many meals interrupted by the telephone; how many hours spent staring at a small screen; how many advertisements competing for their money; how many conversations with uncovered women at work? When a sheikh looks at how to produce hearts that are attached to Allah, he must see what the hearts are like in the first place.

The Primacy of the Koran and Sunna

But aren't the Koran and sunna better? The superiority of the Koran and sunna is not what is at stake here. Rather, the essence of all substantive prescriptions of the Koran and sunna lies in human attitudes toward the Divine, without which they would be but empty forms. There is no question, for example, that the best of speech is the Word of Allah, the Holy Koran. But if a non-Muslim, for example, were to recite the Koran from beginning to end, would it be as beneficial to him as reciting the *Shahada* or Testification of Islam but once, with conviction? Not at all; because what he has is *kufr* or unbelief. He is standing in front of a particular door, to which he needs the key of Iman or faith in Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace). Nothing else will do, no matter how superior in itself. Similarly, reciting the Koran is unquestionably better than supplications from hadith, yet when circumambulating the Kaaba, the latter are better, because one is before a particular door. There is no doubt that the supplications from the sunna are nobler than any we can come up with, yet how many a plea for forgiveness in our own heartfelt words has brought us closer to Allah than intoning volumes of hadith? For that matter, dhikr is better than honking one's horn, but the latter is religiously superior

when needed to save the life of an unwary child. What is the "best" medicine in the pharmacy? It depends on what one has.

IN sum, the hadra of our tariqa, consisting of circles of invocation of Allah (dhikr) conjoined with the singing of permissible poetry and dancing, is compatible with the Sacred Law of orthodox Islam; and when the latter elements facilitate presence of heart with Allah (as they do with most people who possess hearts), they deserve a reward from Allah by those who intend them as such, and enter directly into the *tarbiya* of the path. This is the significance of the hadra to the work of the tariqa.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

WORKS OF THE HEART

ORKS of the heart are in a sense the fruits of the works of knowing and doing described above, and have been treated after them because they furnish the inward measure of the path: that one *be* something. Abu Bakr al-Kattani has said, "Sufism is character: whoever is ahead of you in character is ahead of you in Sufism." These works include many things, of which we may mention here some of the most important.

Knowledge of the Divine (Ma'rifa)

Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said, "Experiential knowledge of the Divine (ma'rifa) is that which dissevers you from other than Allah, and returns you to Him." Given its tremendous emphasis in the Shadhili rule, its reality in the hearts of those blessed with it, and its incomprehensibility to others, people sometimes ask questions such as, "Where does the shari'a talk about *ma'rifa;* how does it fare versus states such as repentance (tawba), trust in Allah, or love, which scriptural texts speak of directly? What does it mean to reach Allah; was this something the early Muslims knew anything about; and if not, then why bother with it?"

To understand the primacy of *ma'rifa* in the tariqa, we should remember first, that Islam is a knowledge-based religion in which salvation comes about not through being of a chosen people, or by vicarious atonement for our sins on a cross, but by *knowing* that "there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger

of Allah." Mere conviction in these two eternal truths is sufficient for salvation from a shari'a perspective.

But in many verses of the Koran, more than thirty, Allah speaks of His special favor, love, and closeness to the *muhsinin*, those of Ihsan or spiritual excellence. Ihsan is the focus of Sufism, something not required at the basic level of shari'a for salvation, but linguistically and religiously meaning to do *more* than the required, literally "to surpass and excel in goodness." The Koranic lexicographer al-Raghib al-Asfahani notes:

> Ihsan is above mere fairness ('adl), for *fairness* means giving what one is obliged to and only taking what one deserves; while Ihsan means giving more than one is obliged to, and taking less than one deserves. Ihsan is accordingly higher than fairness, so observing fairness is obligatory, while observing Ihsan is recommended and supererogatory . . . . This is why Allah Most High has made the recompense of those who surpass in goodness (muhsinin) tremendous, having said Most High: "And truly Allah is wholly on the side of those who excel in goodness" [Koran 29:69] (*Mufradat* [6], 263–64).

Ihsan is thus a perfection that lies along the shari'a continuum of Iman, which is its basic substance, yet it is something more than. When the angel Gabriel asked the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) about Ihsan, after having asked him about Islam and Iman, he answered, "It is to adore Allah as if you see Him, and if you see Him not, He nevertheless sees you" (*Muslim* [74], 1.37–38: 8. 8). This, with the numerous verses of the Koran noted above, is a fully authenticated shari'a basis for Ihsan. From this Prophetic definition are taken the two pillars of the Sufi way, *mushahada* or the heart's 'beholding' the Divine beyond any form, and *muraqaba* or the mind's conscious 'vigilance' that the Divine beholds one.

As for the states of the early Muslims, there is no doubt which of the two above-mentioned states the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) intended as higher; or that it was something he necessarily spoke of from his own firsthand experience; or that

he intended his listeners to also benefit from by attaining. That many of those around him did attain it is borne out by their tremendous works and sacrifices. As Ibn Mas'ud said, "Absolute certitude (yaqin) is all of true faith (Iman) entirely" (*Bukhari* [17], 1.9).

So much may be said for the basis of Ihsan or *ma'rifa* in Islamic revelation. But one should also realize that something which has been empirically observed by a great many people, like the sun in the sky, or that water runs downhill, is already established through the *tawatur* or 'incontestably numerous chains of evidence' of the sheer numbers of its observers, which suffice it from needing further proof of its existence. The basis of *ma'rifa* is attested to not only in the words of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) to the Sahaba, but by the prodigious numbers of those whom Allah blessed with it after them, including the greatest Imams of Ihsan in the *din*, men like 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Dhul Nun al-Misri, Ahmad al-Rifa'i, and others, all of whom agreed upon its reality, and its incomparable benefit and worth.

But perhaps the more immediate means that moves souls to aspire to and ultimately attain Ihsan is a "separate sense" or inner intuition not only of the sacredness of the quest, but that its secret exists in the heart of one's guide, a heartfelt conviction ('aqida) which alone makes it possible for it to be conveyed to one's own. Without this intuition, admittedly a gift from Allah, it is improbable that anyone would realize *ma'rifa*, and joining a faith movement instead might be preferable for such a person to taking a tariqa.

So *ma'rifa* is Iman become actual knowledge, born of experience. It has a reality, an authenticity, and an effect. Its reality is the direct apprehension by one's own contingent *being* (rather than any appurtenance of thought) of the necessary Being of the Divine. Its authenticity is that it is ascribed to Allah, not oneself, so there is no social distinction in it for the *nafs*. As Abu Madyan said, "The pretender is he who alludes to himself"—for it is an experiential relation between two orders of being, not an achievement of the self. Ibn 'Ata Illah has said, "Your reaching Allah is

your reaching the knowledge of Him, for otherwise, our Lord is too tremendous for anything to be joined with Him, or for Him to be joined with anything" (*al-Hikam* [49], 59: 213). And its effect is to "adore Allah as though you see Him," through the other states of being that Allah loves as perfections, to which we now return.

Love of Allah

Love is the wellspring from which the awliya drink, and is the essence of their felicity in this world and the next. Abu Madyan said, "He who is bereft of intimate affection and yearning [for Allah] is devoid of love—and of the inner essences of divine care, and the outer forms of divine protection." And Allah says, "While those who believe are yet mightier in love for Allah" (Koran 2:165).

Love means preferring Allah to any other. It means choosing the way of taqwa when the crux comes. It means asking if Allah will be pleased before asking if oneself will be pleased. It is reached through gratitude to Allah, and dawns on the heart by degrees. Ahmad ibn Abi al-Hawari has said, "The sign of love of Allah is love of His remembrance (dhikr)."

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Whoever has three traits will taste the sweetness of true faith: love of Allah and His messenger above anything else, love of someone for the sake of nothing besides Allah, and to hate to return to unbelief as he would hate to be thrown into the fire" (*Bukhari* [17], 1.10–11: 16. 8).

Love and Hate for the Sake of Allah

A believer does not love or hate individual people because of who they are, but only loves or hates their good or bad traits and actions, those which the Sacred Law praises or blames. His friendships are for Allah, and he parts with former friends if they turn away from Allah.

One of the things plain from this is that ethnic origin cannot be the basis for positive or negative attitudes towards oneself or others. When one of the Meccan Emigrants struck a Medinan

Helper and each group rallied their fellows with cries of solidarity against the other, the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "What is this rallying of each other from the Period of Ignorance?—Leave it, for it turns things putrid" (*Bukhari* [17], 6.191–92: 4905. S). Allah Most High says, "Among His signs are the creation of the heavens and earth, and the difference in your tongues and hues; verily in that there are signs for those who know" (Koran 30:22), that is, signs for wonder and admiration that Allah has brought forth these differences from a single father, Adam (upon whom be blessings and peace). The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) told his Companions:

> Allah Mighty and Majestic has rid you of the arrogance of the Period of Ignorance and its pride in forefathers. God-fearing believer or hapless sinner, people are the sons of Adam, and Adam was of dust. Let peoples cease priding themselves in men, or they will matter less to Allah than the scarab beetle that pushes about filth with its nose (*Ahmad* [52], 2.361: 8736. H).

A human being cannot choose his parents, and there are no racial laws in Islam: when love and hate are for the sake of Allah, the only importance that attaches to pride is that it is a step backwards.

Love of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace)

Allah Most High says, "The Prophet has better right to every preference of believers than they themselves have" (Koran 33:6), meaning to be obeyed, loved, followed, respected, and aided by them. "Love" means one's affection for the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) is pure and real, so that he is more beloved to one than one's self, mother, father, and all other people. It means exalting his station, serving his Umma, following his sunna. It means adhering in word and state, with complete adab, to the path of the vast majority of the early Muslims, the Prophetic line, his Companions, the Imams of his Umma, and the friends (awliya) and knowers of Allah—out of love for the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). It

includes respect towards his descendants (Al al-Bayt), believing in his lofty rank, and saying the Blessings upon him (Allah bless him and give him peace), when he is mentioned and at other times; with presence of heart, or even without. At the tomb in Egypt of two of the sheikhs of our spiritual line, Muhammad Wafa and his son 'Ali, there is a hand-lettered sign upon one of the walls that reads:

> The Pole of the Gnostics Imam Sha'rani (Allah be well pleased with him) relates that the Possessor of Supreme Purity my master Muhammad Wafa al-Shadhili (Allah be well pleased with him) said: "I saw the Liegelord of Worlds (Allah bless him and give him peace) and I asked him, 'O Messenger of Allah, Allah's tenfold blessing upon him who says the Blessings upon you once: Is that for him who has presence of heart?' He said, 'No, it is for anyone who blesses me absentmindedly: Allah bestows upon him the like of mountains of angels, who pray for him and ask forgiveness for him. As for if he is present in heart therein, none but Allah Most High knows the reward of that.'"

Love for the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) also means emulating his refined and modest character. Jabir relates that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

> "Truly, among those of you I love best and who shall be seated closest to me on Resurrection Day shall be the finest of you in character. And truly, those of you I detest most and who shall be seated farthest from me on Resurrection Day shall be praters who talk too much, and those who overpronounce the letters of their words for effect, and windbags who affect stentorian tones." They said, "Praters and overpronouncers we know, but what are windbags?" He said, "The arrogant" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.112: 2137. H).

Sincerity (Ikhlas)

Sincerity includes leaving pretension, leaving *riya* or showing off in spiritual works, leaving *sum'a* or the mention of one's works

to others to gain their esteem, and leaving all hypocrisy. Sheikh al-Kurdi notes:

> Levels of sincerity (ikhlas) [in spiritual works] are three: high, medium, and low. High is for a servant to do works for Allah alone, out of obedience to His command and in fulfillment of the obligations due from his own slavehood. Medium is to do works seeking Allah's reward or to avoid His punishment. Low is for a servant to do works so that Allah may honor him in this world or protect him from its perils [e.g. supplicating for such a purpose, though if that is a means to achieve something at either of the previous two levels, it takes their ruling—while all are considered sincerity (ikhlas)]. Anything besides these three is showing off (riya) (*Risala al-tawhid* [66], 6).

Sahl al-Tustari said, "Sincerity is that all a servant's rest and motions be for Allah and no one else." Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to say the secret of this was to behold through *ma'rifa* that one's spiritual works were created by Allah. As Mustafa al-'Arusi put it,

> [The knower of Allah is] he who sees the Abidingly Real (al-Haqq) through the Abidingly Real, adorning himself with righteous works, while keeping watchful vigilance of the Supremely Exalted; so he sees that the matter is from Him and to Him, and returns in his outward and inward unto Him (*Nata'ij al-afkar* [4], 1.136).

Repentance (Tawba)

Tawba or repentance is the very fuel of the journey to Allah. The only person who does not benefit from this way is the one who has no tawba. Allah has said, "Whoever does not repent, those are the very wrongdoers" (Koran 49:11). Our sheikh used to mention that repentance is of three levels: *tawba*, from sins; *awba*, from bad character traits; and *inaba*, from everything besides Allah. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "By Allah, verily I ask forgiveness of Allah and repent more than seventy times a day" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.83: 6307. 8), teaching us to return to Allah from everything; for he was in continual spiritual

ascent, and his perpetual repentance at every stage was from his prior spiritual stations, which from the vantage of subsequent ones appeared to him utterly insufficient to worship Allah as He deserves. The Prophet also said (Allah bless him and give him peace), "By Him in whose hand is my soul: if you did not commit sins, Allah would do away with you and bring forth a people who committed sins, and so asked His forgiveness, so He might forgive them" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2106: 2749. S). A valid repentance means to desist from the sin, to regret having done it, resolve never to return to it again, and if it concerns something owned by another, to restore it to him. It is of such centrality to the path that when the earliest Sufis described someone taking the tariqa, they merely termed it *his tawba.*

Fear of Allah (Khawf)

Fear of Allah is obligatory, for Allah says, "So fear them not, and fear you Me, if you be true believers" (Koran 3:175). This, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman once told me, is not fear of His Being, for He is the object of our love, but fear of His *maqam* or rank over us; that is, of the justice we deserve for our sins and shortcomings. Allah says in Sura al-Nazi'at, "As for him who fears the station (maqam) of his Lord and forbids his self its vain whims, verily paradise shall be his refuge" (Koran 79:40–41).

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "When Allah created creation, He inscribed in His writ that He has made binding on Himself, being reposited nigh to Him upon the very Throne: 'Verily My mercy overcomes My wrath'" (*Bukhari* [17], 9.147: 7404. S). So there is divine mercy and there is divine wrath, the former being of Allah's infinite beauty (jamal), the latter of His limitless majesty (jalal) and justice. He says, "My chastisement I but smite with whom I will, while My mercy encompasses everything: I shall inscribe it for those who show godfearingness, and pay the alms, and who in Our revealed signs are entire believers: Those who shall follow the messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they find recorded with them in the Torah and Evangel" (Koran 7:156–57). That is, His mercy is prescribed for those willing to listen and to believe and follow.

To understand this is the proper measure of fear, while ignorance of it leads to blameworthy extremes. An excess of fear is *waswasa* or obsessive misgivings about ordinary matters, while lack of fear leads to impudence towards the bounds of Allah, which is destruction itself.

Hope in Allah

One should always think the best of Allah, no matter what the circumstances, for the outcome of the play of forces is unknown to us, while Allah is all-wise and all-powerful, and more concerned for our benefit than we are for ourselves. He has made despair itself a sin. Scholars note, however, that hope should predominate at death, while fear should predominate in one's lifetime, as that is safer.

Thankfulness to Allah

More enduring than either hope or fear, whose scope ends at death, gratitude to Allah is a beatitude that lasts in paradise for eternity. *Thanks* for blessings means using everything Allah has given us for what it has been created for, namely the return to Him. It is the soul of all acts of worship in the Shadhili tariqa, which is known among Sufis as the "Way of Thanks" (Tariqa al-Shukr), not only to distinguish it from that in which spiritual exertions are done to bring about spiritual illumination (Tariqa al-Ishraq); but also because for many of us thankfulness is a far more exacting criterion for spiritual sincerity than any other motive but love, which it is the precursor of. Allah Most High says, "If you show thanks, I shall certainly increase you" (Koran 14:7).

Faithfulness (Wafa)

One must be true-hearted and loyal to Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace), to one's *din*, to one's sheikh, to one's brethren in the path, to one's word, and to the Umma. Abu Madyan said of the Sufi path, "Whoever wants purity, let him hold fast to loyalty."

Patience (Sabr)

Patience is the mirror of one's certainty (yaqin), and is needed to

reach every high aim in the path. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to distinguish between three types, saying: "The masters have conveyed to us that three hundred spiritual degrees may be reached by patience in performing acts of obedience, six hundred degrees by patience in refraining from disobedience, and nine hundred degrees by patience with others." It transmutes the imperfection of the circumstances one is patient with into the perfection of being with Allah, who says in Sura al-Baqara, "Verily Allah is with the patient" (Koran 2:153).

Accepting Fate

Having done everything in one's power, one leaves the rest to Allah; past, present, and future. Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said, "One single trait nullifies all spiritual works, though many people remain unaware of it; namely, a servant's dislike for what Allah has destined. Allah Most High says, 'That is for their resenting what Allah has sent down, so Allah nullified all their works' (Koran 47:9)." Contentment is an inexhaustible treasure, while dissatisfaction is unending want.

Reliance on Allah (Tawakkul)

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "If you ask, then ask Allah" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.489: 2685. S), meaning not that it is wrong to ask anything of others, but rather that one should first ask Allah in prayer before asking them, and rely on Him for the results.

Mercy (Rahma)

We show towards others what we ask for ourselves. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Allah shows no mercy to whoever shows no mercy to people" (*Bukhari* [17], 9.141: 7376. S), and said, "Mercy is not taken out of anyone except the damned" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.50: 2036. S).

Humility (Tawadu')

Outwardly, it consists in following the sunna in matters such as eating as a slave, sitting as a slave, speaking as a slave, not com-

plaining, and showing humility to all believers for Allah's sake. It means accepting advice from one's sheikh. It also means showing particular respect for those older than one, for scholars of the *din*, for leaders (amirs) of Muslims, for one's parents, for one's husband; and that one serve one's peers as a brother; and that one show kindness to those under one's care. Subordination is a blessing from Allah by which He has benefited and ordered all human polities, while disrespect and insolence toward superiors is a divine vengeance against whoever it appears in.

Inwardly, humility means freeing oneself of its opposite, which is *kibr* or arrogance. The way to this, in our tariqa, is by realizing the radical finitude of self before the limitless majesty of God. Sheikh Muhammad al-Buzaydi says:

> Whomever Allah loves, He inspires with humility, lowliness, contrition, and dejection [over his faults]. And whomever Allah hates, He inspires with arrogance. Arrogance is the basis of all vile traits together, the very soul of love of this world; and is the riding-mount of Satan: whoever is beloved to him, he seats upon his riding-mount and takes him wherever he will, the arrogant having no way whatsoever to do good (*al-Adab al-mardiyya* [18], 259).

This is necessarily known as part of the religion, for the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said:

> "No one with the slightest particle of arrogance in his heart shall enter paradise." A man said, "But a man likes his clothes to be nice, and his sandals good." The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Verily, Allah is beautiful and loves beauty. Arrogance is refusing to accept the truth, and considering people beneath one" (*Muslim* [74], 1.93: 91. S).

The first point of this definition of arrogance is the crucial test of humility: that when one learns of the truth—in a matter of faith, attitude, or works; especially when attested to by the ulema of Sacred Law—one drops one's usual habit, personal opinion, or private understanding and follows it. Without this, there can be no humility at all. At its heart lies the exaltation of the Divine

Command, as also with freeing oneself from the second point, "considering people beneath one": we show humility not because we are greater than others or less than others, but because Allah has commanded us to be humble, in view of which the humility we have been ordered to show is above any human being. Thus Ibn 'Ata Illah says, "The humble person is not he who when he acts humbly, sees himself as above what he has done; but rather he who when he acts humbly, sees himself as below what he has done" (*al-Hikam* [49], 64: 239).

Abandoning Envy (Hasad)

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Beware of envy, for envy consumes good works as fire consumes firewood" (*Abu Dawud* [94], 4.276: 4903. HG). Scholars mention that envy is of three types:

1. To wish that another person cease to have something good in order to obtain it oneself;

2. To wish that another lose something good even if one does not obtain it, as when one already has another like it, or does not want it, this being worse than the previous type;

3. Or not to wish that the other cease to have something good, but rather to resent his having surpassed one in attainment or position, accepting his parity with one but not his superiority.

All are unlawful, and all object to Allah's dividing His favor among His servants as He wills, which is ignorance. Allah Most High says in Sura al-Zukhruf: "Are they the ones who apportion the mercy of your Lord? It is We who have divided their livelihoods among them in this life, and raised some of them whole degrees above others so that some might take others as complete subordinates. And the mercy of your Lord is better than all they amass" (Koran 43:32). Despite this, some egos are so possessed by envy that even hearing another praised weighs upon them. One must watch one's heart and reactions carefully, for envy lies at ambush on any path, even spiritual, that involves both a social collectivity and striving in excellence.

Whenever envy appears, one must pop the pimple while it is

still small, by sincere sorrow and disgust at the sin and asking Allah's forgiveness (istighfar), and telling Him one does not accept this trait from one's *nafs*. This must be repeated every time it occurs to one. If left, it will become an abscess, and finally a cancer; when one's thoughts revolve around nothing but the envied, and the heart is on fire. It then requires great *mujahada* to treat, by doing all the above, and in addition sincerely praying for the person whenever he comes to mind that Allah prosper him in *this world* as well as the next. But the real total health plan against envy and indeed every disease of the heart is *ma'rifa:* a heart in which there is nothing but Allah, something that requires much dhikr and tawfiq. As Abu Husayn Bundar said, "Whoever makes much remembrance of Allah, it occupies from the remembrance of men." Envy is a disease, and a Muslim must love for his brother what he loves for himself.

Abandoning Hatred

This refers to hatred of people because of who they are, rather than hatred of the blameworthy traits or actions in them for the sake of Allah Most High, mentioned above. In general, the greater the knowledge of Allah, the less there is to take personally besides Him in the play of events within and without.

If one is afflicted with a particularly severe case of hatred against others that affects one's thoughts and begins to occupy one with daydreams about their death, it has become *malice*. The most effective cure is to remove them from one's tongue. Here, for a period of two years, one does not mention their name at all, whether for praise or blame. If one slips, or if forced to say their name, one abstains for a period of twenty-four hours from a particular item of one's normal habits, set in advance from the beginning and unvarying. It should not be something too drastic, but rather like tea or coffee, or a usual part of one's daily dress or food: merely enough to mildly annoy the *nafs* and remind it that it failed. By the end of two years, Allah willing, one's malice will have subsided, and the self will remain trained in taqwa against the deadly sins that can spring from it.

Abandoning Anger

What is meant, as with hatred above, is anger not because Allah has been disobeyed, but rather for one's own ego. A man came to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) seeking a single comprehensive piece of advice that would combine much benefit, saying, "Teach me something, but don't make it too much, so that I can grasp it." He said, "Do not get angry." The man repeated his question several times, but the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) only repeated, "Do not get angry" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.35: 6116. 8). Some ulema of Sacred Law interpret this figuratively, as prohibiting the bad *consequences* of anger, saying that one cannot be held legally responsible to cease being angry whenever aroused, but rather that the hadith forbids doing or saying what anger urges one to do. Other ulema, among them our sheikhs, take the prohibition literally, pointing out that the basis of personal anger is haughtiness (kibr), a quality in itself unlawful.

A quick temper often comes from being spoiled as a child. Yet the tariqa means to retrain ourselves for Allah, and abandoning anger is but the beginning of Sufism. Lesson One of our *muraqaba* exercises directly addresses anger, and it is applied by everyone in the tariqa. We keep hammering ourselves with it until it happens.

Generosity (Karam)

Teaching the hand to be generous is of central importance to sublimating the ego not only because of the self's strong attachment to money, but because it increases rather than decreases with age. The opposite of generosity, stinginess or greed, is considered by masters of the path to be among the most odious qualities anyone can possess. Ibn 'Ajiba says, "The ugliest of the ugly is the stingy Sufi." Other masters have simply said, "The opposite of Sufism is miserliness." A delegation came to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), and he asked,

> "O Bani Salama, who is your leader?" and they said, "Bishr ibn Qays, though we accuse him of being stingy." The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "What

> sickness is sicker than stinginess?" They said, "Then who should be our leader, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Bishr ibn al-Bara' ibn al-Ma'rur" (*Majma' al-zawa'id* [44], 9.315. HG),

showing that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) actually removed a tribe's leader for cheapness, and that a stingy person is not religiously fit to lead. If all of this is fairly well understood by ethnic Muslims in touch with their traditional values, Western converts often find "being economical" towards others culturally acceptable at some level, and all of us are obliged to study ourselves, our reactions, and our attachments, and to use a generous hand, especially in little things done without ceasing, to produce a generous heart. The easiest way is to reach into one's pocket, pull out some money, and spend it on someone besides oneself. Spending on one's dependents is *sadaqa* or charity. A true Sufi is lavish to his wife and family, to the needy, and to his friends. Abu Madyan said, "Whoever taking is more beloved to than giving is not a mystic (faqir)."

Good Character (Husn al-Khuluq)

Imam Ghazali summarizes the signs of good character in his *Ihya' 'ulum al-din* by noting that good character is Iman or true faith, while bad character is *nifaq* or hypocrisy. He then adds the following summary of the marks of good character:

> It is to be very modest and shy, to do little harm and much good, be truthful of speech, few of words and many of works, few of sins. It is to mind one's own business, be kind and solicitous, faithful in keeping ties with others; to be dignified, always patient, ever thankful; be satisfied with little, clement, gentle, without lust or greed, and feel empathy with others. It is not to curse, revile, bear tales between people, or slander; or show rude overhaste, be malicious, stingy, or envious. It is to be cheerful and pleasant, to love for Allah, hate for Allah, be pleased for Allah, and be angry for Allah. That is what good character consists in (*Ihya' 'ulum al-din* [33], 3.59–60).

ALL of the foregoing traits are marks that appear in souls that lift their gaze to eternity. Here, the light of unchanging truth is the text, and the hearts and hands of those treading its path are its commentary. Imam 'Ali (Allah be well pleased with him) said: "This world is journeying inevitably away, and the next world is journeying inexorably hence, and each has its own sons. So be of the sons of the next world, not of the sons of this: for today is but works and no reckoning, while tomorrow is but reckoning and no works" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.110: 6416(b)). We now return to our temporal context to see how best to apply this.

CHAPTER TWELVE

LIFE, WORK, AND WEALTH

HE way of the Sufi in dealing with this world is wisdom, meaning to put everything in its proper place. He realizes that the next world is more important than this one, actions last forever, and that things are ephemeral. Now, wisdom is that which leads to a good life, and as Zakariyya al-Ansari said, "a good life is only through the life of the heart, its life consisting in freeing it of heedlessness (ghafla) and being perpetually aware of why one was created."

So this world may be either praiseworthy or blameworthy. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "This world and all it contains are accursed, except the remembrance of Allah, that which He loves, or the possessor of Sacred Knowledge or someone learning it" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.357: 2475. H). So whatever is for Allah is connected, while whatever is for other than Allah is dissevered. This world is praiseworthy when it is a means to Allah, but blameworthy if any part of it becomes an end in itself, be it fame, fortune, family, or anything else. Allah Most High says,

> The life of this world is but like the water We send down, and it luxuriantly thickens the herbage of the earth on which man and beast feed; until, when the earth has taken on its adornment and is decked out surpassing fair, and its folk believe it entirely at their behest, Our judgement reaches it, by night or by day, and We make it mown down stubble, as though it flourished not but yesterday (Koran 10:24).

As for our experience of it, Ibn 'Ata Illah has said,

> Every state is necessarily transitory, for what the Abidingly Real (al-Haqq) intends is to put the servant through stages, and make circumstances succeed each other in him, in order to disclose Himself to him in every particular state with a particular disclosure; while whoever wants but a single state does not want perfection (*Iqadh al-himam* [47], 2.241–42).

In work, marriage, or friends, a good life is a life in Allah.

Work

Having a good job is not a hindrance to the spiritual path, but may rather be a help, as long as it leaves time and focus for Allah. The Ottoman sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II had a Shadhili sheikh, as sultans before him had had sheikhs, illustrating that a Sufi may be in the world, but not *of* the world.

People who grow up without having ever worked seldom prove very capable. Life takes patience, and there is a great deal of educational benefit in working for a boss, overcoming problems, seeing results, and learning how to succeed, to fail, and to take criticisms all in stride. Such training helps produce the tenacity needed to succeed at virtually anything in life, including the spiritual path. Working early in life teaches one not only the value of time, money, effort, and others, but also what to expect and not to expect from a career.

In choosing an occupation, one should find an endeavor that one can sincerely put one's efforts behind. Money and prestige are not the only considerations. For someone to go through medical school, for example, who has no talent or inclination to help the ill is only asking for problems later in life. When considering a profession, one should talk to a number of people who have done it, ask about its advantages and disadvantages, whether it gave them time for the important things in life, and whether they would do it again. Between the ages of twenty and forty, a man must generally work harder than in other stages of life to establish himself, entailing some sacrifices and distractions (ghafla), but these should be intended to fulfill his religion, not replace it.

When thinking of a career, there is baraka in consulting one's sheikh or his *muqaddam* or 'helper' before praying an *istikhara*. If not possible to reach them, one's *istikhara* suffices. Similarly, in every matter of importance, it is best to first grasp the matter, then pray an *istikhara* before it. The answer to an *istikhara* may merely be the heart's inclining towards the particular alternative, and need not be a dream or a "sign." Or sometimes one's inclination may be towards one alternative, but through the baraka of the *istikhara*, Allah will turn it aside and bring about something better; whether by shedding new light on the matter or by some other means. Such an answer, proceeding from Allah's *qudra* or 'omnipotent power' rather than from a personal feeling, is equally of the tawfiq of the *istikhara*.

The Adab of Working

Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman worked all his life, and emphasized the importance of dedicating one's daily labors to Allah. Imam Ghazali treats this in his *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, where a discussion may be found of many of the points listed here. In earning a living, one should:

1. Intend from the beginning to: (a) become financially independent through one's own halal income; (b) free oneself from asking others for money or wanting what they have; (c) gain the means to live a religious life and support one's family; (d) have taqwa in such matters as avoiding waste, being on time for work, and dealing politely and honestly with people; (e) want for others what one wants for oneself; (f) be generous, kind, and fair to others in commercial dealings; (g) enjoin the right and forbid the wrong when necessary, if one can; and (h) sincerely do, wish, and advise the best for all Muslims.

2. Not merely choose a halal means of making a living, but intend thereby fulfilling a communal obligation (fard kifaya), since in many cases if one's occupation were neglected by all, the community itself would come to a halt.

3. Realize that having a job is a blessing from Allah. One should never criticize the person who employs one, but if one dislikes a job, one should either better it, or find another. Sheikh

'Abd al-Rahman used to advise people not to leave their job until they had found a better one, unless it was clearly haram.

4. Never let the marketplace of this world distract one from the marketplace of the next; namely, by going to the mosque and praying if one can.

5. Not confine oneself to that, but remember Allah with dhikr and taqwa while working, and especially when buying and selling, which gives baraka to one's life and money.

6. Not be greedy and grasping, going to every length for profits, but rather showing good character and generosity. A seller should: (a) mention any defect in his merchandise; (b) not praise it exaggeratedly; (c) honestly disclose its current market value if asked; (d) not charge a great deal more than it usually costs, though he may well accept someone else charging *him* more, especially if the person is needy; (e) always be polite in collecting payment; (f) pay off his own debts as soon as humanly possible; (g) follow the Prophetic sunna by paying back a little more on debts than the amount owed; (h) freely cancel the deal and refund the price if the other party asks, as he may be in need; and (i) not require the poor to pay before they can afford to.

7. Not merely shun the unlawful, but avoid circumstances entailing doubtful legality and probable harm to others.

8. Think carefully again later about one's dealings with each person to make sure that one can answer for them to Allah on the Last Day.

Dealings Between Tariqa Members

There are advantages and baraka in dealing with people of Iman and taqwa, yet the greater baraka of following a sheikh and a tariqa cannot work when there are personal problems between members. So if members want to conduct any business with one another besides sales for cash paid out of hand, they are asked to observe the following rules.

1. Because of the imperative of having a trouble-free atmosphere, Sheikh al-Hashimi used to tell brethren not to go into business with each other unless they found a complete readiness in their hearts beforehand to freely relinquish all their capital,

labor, and earnings to the other partner without any complaint or objection should they later have a disagreement. This condition of the heart is as important as any that follow.

2. Every transaction between disciples that is not paid for and delivered immediately and that exceeds a week's wages of either of them, must be written down, dated, and signed by each party in duplicate, so that each retain a copy. This includes buying or selling by deferred payment, commissioning another to buy something for one, and other transactions. If done by telephone or online, the parties must agree on the wording of the deal, which they each record on their own end. A single line about it on a signed slip of paper is sufficient.

3. Whoever is asked about a prospective business or marriage partner must give honest and telling advice, such as: "I don't know him well enough to advise you"; "She is hopeless with money"; "I don't know how he is with money, I always see him at the mosque, but everyone is a bit different in financial matters"; "It is not in your interest to deal with him"; or simply, "Give it a miss." The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Whoever is asked for advice is responsible to deliver his trust" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 5.102: 3033. S).

4. All work, investments, loans, or other contracts must be of a form approved in advance by an Islamic scholar who has mastered shari'a contracts, and be signed by the two parties before any work is done or money handed over. In general, whoever loans money to friends should be aware that he may lose both, and it is mere wisdom not to have more than one large loan due from anyone at a time. A previously unpaid loan is sufficient reason not to give another.

5. Finally, to promote the sunna of earning one's own living, it is not permitted to give other murids monetary donations for need, whether as charity, gifts, or "loans" in name only, whether for the recipient or to be given to others, without first clearing with the sheikh or his *muqaddam* (aide) that the person is actually deserving and needy, the sole exception to which is between family members, who need no clearance. Abuses may otherwise get started, and a fool and his money are soon parted.

Riba (Usury)

The Sacred Law, as a plan for a whole way of life, deals with every facet of human existence. The traveller to Allah must scrupulously adhere to it in every aspect of his life if his journey is to be successful. With this key point in view, the guidelines given below should be observed by everyone who seeks to live according to taqwa in his dealings with the financial world we find around us, as this is the area where not a few fall into the unlawful.

Dealing in *riba* or usury is a very grave sin in Islam. It is listed as an enormity (kabira) by everyone who has written on the subject, and is the seventh major sin in Imam Dhahabi's *Kitab al-kaba'ir* [Book of enormities]. The gravity of this sin is borne out by the words of Allah

> O you who believe, fear Allah, and completely discard what remains of usury if you be true believers. If you will not, then know of a devastating war against you from Allah and His messenger; And if you repent, you may keep your original wealth, neither wronging nor being wronged (Koran 2:278–79).

There is no other crime besides it in the entire Sacred Law from beginning to end that merits *war* from Allah except enmity towards the awliya of Allah. And if Allah, Master of every atom in existence, declares war against someone, who is going to win? Jabir (Allah be well pleased with him) relates that "the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) cursed whoever eats of usury, feeds it to another, records it, and its two witnesses, and he said, 'All are alike'" (*Muslim* [74], 3.1219: 1598. s).

In light of the direness of the warnings from Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace), the spiritual traveller must disregard all so-called fatwas that declare any form of finance usury (riba) to be lawful. Such opinions are the product of a psychologically defeated and humiliated Islam that emerged after the colonization of Muslim lands and abolishment of the social and political manifestation of the Sacred Law. The traveller should help bring it back by taking the following steps:

1. Cease all buying on credit. This includes houses and cars. Credit buying is the widest door leading to usury in the West, to say nothing of the grave consequences of debt in Islam. All existing debts should be paid off as soon as possible. Houses or cars purchased on interest-based installment plans should be sold as soon as possible. This imposes little burden on Muslims in the West as decent housing can be rented, and reliable used cars can be readily obtained at manageable prices. As for buying clothing and furniture on credit, these purchases are usually wasteful and unnecessary to begin with.

2. Credit cards are a useful form of identification and handy for renting cars and other items. If one chooses to maintain a credit card, those which facilitate such transactions but don't apply interest are preferred, such as debit cards, which take funds directly out of one's account, or those like American Express which require payment at the end of each month without interest. If the spiritual traveller cannot obtain one of these or similar cards, and chooses to maintain a regular credit card, he must pay all bills immediately before any interest accrues. If he finds he is frequently tardy in paying such bills, thereby falling into interest, he should pay off the debt once and for all and discard the credit card immediately.

3. Taking loans from banks, savings and loans associations, credit unions, and the like should be avoided as much as possible. This will not only help keep the traveller away from interest and debt, it will also help to undermine the banking industry, an industry which is primarily driving the economic enslavement and rape of most of humanity, including the Muslim world. If home financing is necessary, it should only be done with a financial product currently certified by name as shari'a-compliant by the Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI). Many "Islamic" finance plans are haram as a whole or in details, others *were* halal but have since been changed, and for still others, the certifying muftis have little specific Islamic Finance training, or even lack taqwa. To use an insufficiently certified product, or resort to accursed "conventional financing," solves one problem, a roof over one's head, but brings

down a shower of other problems in one's money, family, and life by being at war with Allah.

4. If one places one's money in banks, it should only be in a non-interest-bearing checking account. If one has interest from a regular savings account, before one converts one's account to a non-interest-bearing account, the interest should be given anonymously to a non-Islamic charity, such as the American Cancer Society, that does not help the balance of power against Islam. As for the argument that any money in banks should be left in interest-bearing accounts indefinitely in order to make charitable contributions, this practice should be avoided.

5. As for insurance, nothing has changed since *Reliance of the Traveller* was written: insurance is still haram because it is usurious. A policy is taken out to pay back far more than one pays into it. This suffices for its unlawfulness, but in the words of the *Reliance:*

> In addition to the fact that they are usurious, buying and selling insurance policies are unlawful because of the Prophet's prohibition (Allah bless him and give him peace) of sales in which there is a chance or risk (gharar). Muslim relates from Abu Hurayra that "the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) prohibited sales of 'whatever a pebble thrown by the seller hits,' and sales in which there is a chance or risk (gharar)" (*Muslim* [74], 3.1153: 1513. s). *Gharar* is "chance or risk, meaning it is not known whether it will come to be or not, such as selling fish in the water or birds on the wing. . . . It includes transactions of unknown things, the particulars of which are not fully comprehended by the buyer and seller" (*al-Mughrib* [76], 2.100).
>
> Urging the permissibility of insurance, one Muslim modernist has written that the very precise statistical data possessed by insurance companies concerning the probabilities of various eventualities makes what they are selling determinately *known* (ma'lum). This argument fails when one realizes that statistical data from a group of events yields

probability figures that, properly speaking, are a description of the group as a whole, and are only analogically applied to the individual events within it. When generalized to similar groups of events in the future, such probabilities yield commercially useful knowledge about the likelihood of a particular outcome for these future groups. But they cannot and do not tell what the outcome will be for any particular member of the group, in this case the particular insurance policy. Thus, a "17 percent probability" that circumstances will enable one to collect such and such an amount on a policy is a mere description of the whole group of previous policy holders in similar circumstances, which does not tell whether one will collect the amount or not. One may collect a certain amount or may not collect it, which is precisely the *gharar* that is unlawful.

When one needs a car in a country whose laws force one to have car liability insurance, buying the insurance has effectively become a tax, and is the moral responsibility of the lawmakers, not the person forced to comply (*Reliance of the Traveller* [71], 942–43).

With the above in mind, Sheikh Wahbeh al-Zuhayli was asked for a fatwa about health insurance in the United States, where as yet (2011) there is no national health care plan, and medical treatment can be so costly that a serious health crisis for some families can mean financial ruin or not getting treated. He gave a detailed reply too long to reproduce here, but at the end of which he said,

To summarize, it is possible to say—sometimes, with the previously noted strictures [including inability of some people in North America to afford medical treatment]—that health insurance is lawful for certain individuals out of necessity or need; namely, those who are poor or of medium income, because of their inability to immediately pay [for treatment], and because some hospitals do not agree to give treatment without insurance, and those who do, discriminate in their dealings [between those who have it and those who do not], as the [fatwa] question made clear—While

keeping in mind that preserving life and treatment of the ill is something fundamental to life and health—which is not true of insurance for fire, theft, drowning, or the like. And Allah knows best (*Fatwa* [106], 11 March 2003, 1).

6. Anyone working in an industry directly connected with institutionalizing the unlawful, such as banks, or stores selling pork, alcohol, pornography, and the like, should immediately begin looking for alternative forms of employment, even if it involves a loss of income. A little of the lawful that is blessed is better than a lot of the unlawful that is devoid of any blessing. The search for alternative employment should be sincere and earnest. If a substantial period of time elapses and one finds that one's livelihood is still directly connected with the unlawful, one should seriously consider emigrating to a place where one can find lawful employment.

This said, it is godfearing enough in our times to avoid work that directly deals with or is an immediate cause of the unlawful. As for mere possibilities or indirect causative factors contributing to the unlawful, it is very difficult to avoid all such things in most jobs, and because it is obligatory to support one's family with honest work, one should do the best one can, and rely on Allah for help with the rest.

If we are inconvenienced by any of these measures, we should remember that a Sufi is a *mujahid* or spiritual warrior. He is engaged in a battle against his *nafs*, and he is engaged in a battle against oppressive practices and institutions which the Devil and his minions have initiated to veil human beings from Allah. As Abu Sulayman al-Darani has said, "He who gives up something of this world for the sake of the next one gains both; while whoever gives up something of the next world for the sake of this one loses both." Success in this matter will not only benefit our souls, but provide tangible benefits to all of humanity.

Spending

Allah says, "Every soul shall taste of death, and you shall only be given your full deserts on the Day of Resurrection: So whoever is snatched from the fire and put in paradise has triumphed safe

forever; While the life of this world is naught but the furnishings of deception" (Koran 3:185). The rule of the salik is simplicity, and a soul that keeps a check on itself in luxuries will travel further. Abu 'Uthman al-Maghribi said, "A Sufi owns things by choice, while nothing owns him by compulsion."

One sign of this is that one expends in the path of Allah, not only the zakat that already belongs to deserving recipients by the mere fact of a year having elapsed on one's wealth, but giving *sadaqa* or 'charity' to those in need. Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said, "When someone with a mystic path (faqir) who works for a living does not follow four rules, by no means consider him to be anything, even if he is the most learned of mankind: shunning the company of oppressors, preferring those of the next world, giving charity to the needy, and attending the five prayers in congregation." The best *sadaqa* is to give a generous monthly amount for the poor that one never spends less than, in addition to giving for causes that arise, especially for relatives and family, the righteous, disaster relief, supporting the local mosque and its activities, and educating others in Islam, Iman, and Ihsan. Like other supererogatory works, *sadaqa* is best given in complete secrecy; while like other obligatory acts of worship, zakat is best to give openly, unless it would embarrass the recipient. *Sadaqa* is particularly beloved to Allah when given by those just starting out in life who fear running short of their livelihood. People accept a great many faults in someone who is generous. Though debts should be paid off as soon as possible, giving charity is a source of baraka to be able to do so quickly and easily. It is a powerful means for prayers to be accepted, for good health, for continued prosperity, for re-educating the *nafs* in generosity, and for facilitating everything one wants in this world and the next. It is beloved to Allah.

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "O human being, for you to expend the surplus is certainly better for you, and to withhold it is certainly worse; and you will not be blamed for having just enough; and begin with those dependent on you; and the upper hand [that gives] is better than the lower hand [that receives]" (*Muslim* [74], 2.718: 1036. s). And when the

Prophet returned in triumph (Allah bless him and give him peace) from Khaybar, some of his wives thought of asking for a few luxuries in their sparse lives, and Allah inspired him that they were all to live on just enough:

> O Prophet, say to your wives: "If you desire the life of this world and its bedizenment, come hence and I will give you a parting gift and let you go with a gracious fair release. But if you truly desire Allah and His messenger and the Final Abode, Allah has prepared for those of you who excel in goodness an immeasurable wage" (Koran 33:28–29).

But there is also an aspect in the shari'a of enjoying one's blessings with thanks and praise, as Allah makes clear by the words "Say: Who has forbidden the finery of Allah that He has brought forth for His servants, and the goodly viands of providence? Say: They are for those who believe, in this life, and for them alone on the Day of Resurrection; Thus do We propound the verses for a people who truly know" (Koran 7:32). The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) clarified his sunna in this by saying, "Eat, drink, give charity, and dress without conceitedness or waste; truly Allah loves for His blessing to be apparent upon His servant" (*Ahmad* [52], 2.182: 6708. H).

That is, worldly blessings are not blameworthy in themselves, but because they may distract hearts from Allah. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to say that the path took one from sins to repentance, from attachment to this world to indifference to it, from ugly character to gracious character, and from the world of the physical (mulk) to the world of the spiritual (malakut) and the world of unspeakable power (jabarut). Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said, "Any enjoyment that moves you to want another just like it is but the tool of the Devil and his weapon; while any enjoyment that moves you to worship Allah and aspire to the path of good deeds is praiseworthy." So pleasures that bring thoughts of worldly distinction, greed, or envy are a veil, while those that direct one to their Maker remain permissible to the traveller when other things are not more pressing or more beloved to Allah. The sheikh advised me, "Shun the superfluous."

Imam Ghazali elucidates the two faces of the world by saying, "The definition of *this world* is everything that is overspread by the sky or held up by the ground, except what is intended for Allah of that." The latter may include gifts. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Give gifts to each other, for gift-giving frees hearts of ill will" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.208: 2264. HG). 'Umar (Allah be well pleased with him) related:

> The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) used to give me wealth [in excess of recompense for work for the Muslims], and I would say, "Give it to someone poorer than I," and he would reply, "Accept it: When any such wealth comes to you, and you are not eager for it or seeking it, then take it. But if you are, then don't let your self pursue it" (*Bukhari* [17], 2.152–53: 1473. S).

In the tariqa, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman taught us never to refuse a gift, ask for one, or to hoard things. Whatever comes to us without stratagem or greed we may accept, while giving to others even lavishly remains a sunna and a means of drawing nearer to Allah when so intended. The foregoing are general principles, from which some particular examples may be cited.

Wealth, Possessions, and Waste

In general, it is a sunna to dress well when one is making dhikr, praying, or meeting others. Good food and drink are a means of worship when intended as such. Beneficial wealth is that which is spent on one's family, or gifts to others, charity, gaining useful knowledge, facilitating one's work or worship, making final bequests for religious purposes, or saving up for such things as buying a home, the children's education, building mosques, training ulema, or fulfilling other Islamic communal obligations—all of which are sound reasons to make and save money.

Tasteful adornment in one's home is also unobjectionable, especially in rooms intended for the reception of guests, whom we have been commanded to honor, while pride, pomp, or vying with others in expense are all unworthy intentions. Splendor, for example, in a bedroom, bathroom, or kitchen is a waste of money,

because convenience and utility are what matter there, and there is nothing in it for Allah.

Otherwise, if one intends by halal enjoyments to gain Allah's good pleasure, such as building one's strength with exercise to better do good works, reading classical literature to improve one's diction, going on religious or educational outings to benefit oneself or enter happiness into the hearts of those with one, enjoying things of life for which one praises Allah's beauty and largesse or which manifest His blessings upon one—all of these are acceptable in the amounts that are beneficial to the individual, do not waste time, and please Allah.

The beginning of the path differs in this from the end, and the ability to discern "how much is too much" only comes to most travellers after years of self-discipline in the path. What is safest for disciples at the beginning is not to go anywhere they do not expect the reward of Allah, and to take a sober look at their belongings and then sell or to give away in charity everything that they have not actually used for a while. If one notices others with amenities or pastimes, one should not assume that it hinders them from dhikr, though one should assume this about oneself until the power of the dhikr has really descended into the heart. Abu 'Ali al-Rudhabari said, "The *disciple* is someone who wants nothing but what Allah wants for him; while the *adept* is someone who wants nothing from this world or the next except Allah."

In the Koran, the prophet Job (upon whom be peace), who bore patiently with adversity, ruin, and loss, was praised by Allah with the words "How excellent a servant, verily he was ever-returning in sincere repentance" (Koran 38:44)—while the prophet Solomon (upon whom be peace), who possessed great wealth, might, and kingship, was praised with the very same words: "How excellent a servant, verily he was ever-returning in sincere repentance" (Koran 38:30). Solomon's sovereignty was in his hand; not in his heart, which was purely for Allah, as he told the Queen of Sheba: "For what Allah has bestowed on me is better than all He has given you" (Koran 27:36).

Early in Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman's life, he bought a plot of land

near his sheikh's home high on the side of Mount Qasiyun overlooking Damascus, and built a small house for himself, his wife, and his young family. He was poor, and would arrange the extra concrete blocks on the ground outside the door in a circle for his guests to sit on while they sang *qasida*s together in the evenings.

By the end of his life, it had grown to a four-storey home with a rooftop garden, and was comfortable and well-appointed by middle-class standards. The sheikh ate well, if simply and sparingly, dressed well, and lived well. He took pains to distinguish to us the way of the Sufi from the way of those he termed "devotees and ascetics." As Ibn 'Ata Illah noted: "Devotees and ascetics are but alienated from everything because they are absent from Allah in everything. If they beheld Him in everything, they would not be alienated by anything" (*al-Hikam* [49], 40: 115). Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman's connection with the Divine and freedom from this world were if anything even more complete at the end of his life than at the beginning. As Abul 'Abbas al-Mursi said, "The knower of Allah has no 'this world,' for his this world is for his next world, and his next world is for his Lord."

Hajji Baba too at the end of his life replaced his humble grocery store with a large building, and worked there without this diminishing anything of his state. Imam Suhrawardi has said:

> Those at the final reaches of the spiritual path, whenever they increase in blessings, increase in slavehood; when they increase in this world, they increase in closeness; when they increase in prestige and rank, they increase in humility and lowliness, "humble towards believers, unbending towards unbelievers" [Koran 5:54]; and when they satisfy one of the desires of the lower self, it elicits pure gratitude from them. Sometimes they partake of pleasures out of lenience towards their lower selves—since they are with them as with a young child who is shown tenderness with something and given a gift because he is wholly under the authority of another and at his mercy and kindness—while at other times they forbid their lower selves from pleasures, in emulation of the prophets and their preference of doing with less of worldly desires (*'Awarif al-ma'arif* [97], 539).

So our rule is to keep possessions simple in the beginning, and use diplomacy with the *nafs* by giving it what it wants, taking from it the dhikr and good works that *we* want, and sublimating it over the years with dhikr, charity, and service. We may later add to our possessions what increases our presence of heart with Allah or otherwise helps to perform spiritual works or worldly duties, taking His permission for major things by *istikhara.* To summarize, "luxury" (taraf) in the religiously blameworthy sense is that which leads to lack of spiritual works, laziness in the path, or weakness in religion. Abul 'Abbas al-Mursi related, "I went to the sheikh [Abul Hasan al-Shadhili], and was thinking of eating coarse food and wearing coarse clothes, and he told me, 'Abul 'Abbas, *know* Allah, and be however you wish.'"

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PASTIMES

AMUSEMENT is a transient by-product of living. A sense of humor about oneself, the ironies of life, or one's predicament is a natural response that often helps more than it hurts. Lighter moments and laughter can revive the heart to worship Allah better. But amusement should remain woven into the texture of human existence. When extracted, refined, and purveyed as a commodity, it subtracts from the meaning of life, which lies rather in its divine context. In this it is much like the conception of beauty in the traditional aesthetic of Islam.

In robust and ascendant Islamic civilizations, beauty was never divorced from the tapestry of living, to be monopolized by a class of "artists," sold by brokers, hung in galleries, or to fan competitive consumption the higher; but was rather produced by *artisans* for daily life in private and public. Muslims built sublime and comfortable architectural achievements, decorated mosques and homes with graceful calligraphy of poetry and Koranic verses, bound books, illuminated manuscripts, and manufactured exquisite scents to be shared between friends coming together for worship or converse. They made poems to be passed on, sung, and recited among others, prepared foods shared with guests and family, wove beautiful geometric and floral carpets to sit on, and produced clothing, weapons, accoutrements, household furnishings, gardens, and fountains to live with. These things were not "works of art" but rather *artifacts* both utilitarian and graceful by

the grace of Allah. Their outer beauty came naturally of the inner beauty of the divine point of life. The beauty loved by Allah was that which reflected His own beauty in bestowing mankind a perfect religion of life.

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Everything by which a Muslim man entertains himself is vain falsehood—except shooting his bow, training his horse, or playing around with his wife: for verily these are of the truth" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 3.446: 1731. HG).

The former two entailed greater military preparedness for the community, while the latter improved family life. The guidance therein is that any pastime which fulfills an aim pleasing to Allah is truth, while something done for nothing beyond the "fun of it" is vain falsehood, that a grown man would do better than to waste his time on, unless he intends to lift the spirits of his wife or children, or something else pleasing to Allah. Entertainment in Islam, other than celebrating festive occasions placed in our lives by our Maker, should be understood in reference to these. Abul Hasan said, "Do not stir your feet except to where you expect the reward of Allah."

The scope of this is wider than it seems at first glance. When intended as such, one can hope for Allah's good pleasure and reward in such things as jokes that put people at ease, or lighthearted words to show others that one is down to earth and not arrogant, or to relieve their shyness or fear, cheer up the sad or ill, entertain one's family, or to bring happiness to children's hearts. The ulema of Damascus often took their families for picnics on weekends to the gardens and rivers of the outdoor resorts past the edge of town.

Similarly, going on hajj or 'umra, or in other lands hiking and camping trips, can teach people, young and old, many useful things in the setting of the outdoors and the unfamiliar, where events do not always happen as planned. Children and adults learn how to survive, improvise, keep dry, pray outside, get along with others, cook over a fire, share, face danger, deal with the unexpected, not whine, and think outside of the usual box of ordinary life. They learn unforgettable lessons about plants, animals,

the lay of the land, thinking ahead, common sense, being prepared, safety, patience, effort, silence, hunger, vigilance, working together, leadership, following, and waiting to see instead of asking others. All of these are the fruits of excursions, particularly when somewhat remote and extended, and all can help a great deal in later life and work and even the path to Allah. Games that teach children how to pit themselves against opponents, win, lose, and play fair are also edifying; as are trips to museums, libraries, parks, aquariums, zoos that are humane and decent, wildlife reserves, landmarks, mountains, pastures, farmlands, rivers, and the sea.

Good books cultivate the mind, broaden horizons, prevent barbarism, and strengthen the power of expression. The rule "First, do no harm" however applies here, and works of authors who have a low, sordid, and pathetic view of mankind should be avoided, even if they can write like the devil. Brilliant psychological insights, drama, and characterizations mean little if they spread disease. Children's books that teach bad character, fantasies, violence, sorcery, and escapism are a detriment. The mere occupation of children's reading is not a value in itself for parents to be euphoric over, but should actually do something for them. They would often be better filling their empty heads with memorized wisdom, learned by heart at an age when it is easy for them so they may later benefit from it. A second rule is that one's time spent on literature could not be better spent on other things, generally meaning that such reading occupies a relatively short period of one's daily hours. When I asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman about reading literature, he replied, "If you have the time." Third, literature should be intended to better oneself for Allah, in accordance with the words of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) "Be desirous for what benefits you" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2052: 2664. S); that is, it should be decent, intellectually challenging, and in some way uplifting. Books of fiction and poetry should be clean and unobjectionable, something which many famous authors have been disinclined to since sometime after the mid-nineteenth century; so masters of literature from before them are preferable if one cannot find any modern writers except

the godless. Bad books are bad companions. Non-fiction remains a resource if the content is valuable.

As for news, a good test is to read a newspaper or periodical as one usually does, circle with a pen the articles one reads, keep the publication for three weeks, then return to it and see how many of the articles really benefited one. Reading should change one's life for the better. Many popular news magazines and political and economic journals today subtly or unsubtly promote, enthuse, or otherwise prepare minds for the coming policy objectives of their countries. Newspapers, television, and radio too often follow in step, and even vogue science magazines keep up with glowing prospectives, scattered among their other articles, about whatever the energy or war industries want to do next. It may not be completely orchestrated, but the consistency with which it errs on the side of powerful, moneyed quarters makes it something to be taken with a grain of salt. A better way to learn about something in the real world is to find someone with years of experience in the field and read his book on it. Books are typically more conscientiously produced, give a nuanced account of the subject, and bear the name of their authors. The mere deadlines of daily newsmen make it impossible for them to be very sure of their facts. Likewise, a salik should not waste the irreplaceable moments of his life on blogs, which mix showing off and self-indulgence with the ephemera of which they tell. Reading slander is no more halal than listening to it. Wasted days and wasted nights are far from Sufism. Someone with something to say should publish a book about it: the early classic works of Sufis still teach people to this day after a thousand years of continuous benefit, something most unlikely to happen with much of what is washed up by the media today.

Art

Because the path is one of souls and hearts, not figures or images, the salik should wean himself from haram depiction of animate life—in photographs, movies, paintings, videos, digital technology, statues, magazines, television, or anything else. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

1. "The most severely punished by Allah of all people on the Day of Resurrection shall be those who produced images" (*Bukhari* [17], 7.215: 5950. S).

2. "A portion will come out of the hellfire on Resurrection Day with two eyes that see, two ears that hear, and a tongue that speaks, saying, 'Verily, I have been put in charge of three: every haughty oppressor, whoever prayed to any god but Allah, and those who made images'" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.534: 2754. S).

3. 'Aisha said: "The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) once came to me, when I had covered a niche in the wall with a curtain that had pictures on it [of "winged horses," in another hadith in *Muslim*]. So when the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) saw it, he tore it down, his face flushed, and he said, 'O 'Aisha: the most dreadfully punished of all people by Allah on the Day of Resurrection shall be those who imitate the creating of Allah.' So we cut it up and made one or two cushions out of it" (*Muslim* [74], 3.1668: 2107(8). S).

This hadith shows that the images forbidden by Islam include not merely three-dimensional statues, but two-dimensional pictures as well, for nothing else is printed on cloth curtains. Imam Nawawi says:

> Making an image of any living being is very severely prohibited. As for having or acquiring one, if it is hanging upon a wall, whether three-dimensional or flat, or if it is worn, or is on a turban and the like, it is unlawful. As for cushions and similar, used in a humiliated deployment [i.e. leaned or sat upon as a cushion, or walked on as a rug], it is not unlawful (*Irshad al-sari* [83], 8.482).

4. A man came to Ibn 'Abbas and said, "I'm a man who makes these figures, so give me a fatwa about them." So he told him, "Come closer to me," and he drew nearer to him. Then he said, "Come closer to me," and he drew nearer to him, until he put his hand on the man's head [Ibn 'Abbas being blind at the end of his life]. He said, "I give you tidings of what I heard from the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace): I heard the Messenger of Allah say, 'Every maker of images shall be in the

fire; he shall be made to give life to every image he made, and it will torment him in hell.' So if you must, depict trees, and that which has no animate life" (*Muslim* [74], 3.1670–71: 2110. S).

5. "Angels do not enter a house in which there are images, or a dog, or someone [frequently] in major ritual impurity (janaba)" (*Abu Dawud* [94], 4.72–73: 4152. S).

6. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) cursed tattooers, those who have tattooing done, and whoever eats of usury or feeds its proceeds to another. He made unlawful the price of a dog and the earnings of a prostitute, and he cursed those who make images (*Bukhari* [17], 7.79: 5347. S).

At the very least, these hadiths, to mention but six from a great many, show that the initial presumption (asl) in the shari'a for images of living things is that they are haram. Legal dispensations from stricter rulings are discussed below, but the words of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) on such images are telling, and suffice to warn the spiritual traveller against them.

Digital Social Media

We have mentioned in chapter 7 above the effects of the online world in general on the human heart. Man has survived to an age when a monolithic entertainment industry aggressively thrusts itself on anyone with money to pay for it; while the heart of a dervish is a heart in which there is nothing but God. Addictions are always low, degrading, and pathetic, whether amphetamine users crouched together in an abandoned tenement, or family members hunched over their laptops ignoring each other in the living room. Life was not made for this.

Allah says: "Verily Allah has bought from believers their lives and their possessions that they may have paradise" (Koran 9:111). The paradise of luxuriant eternal groves and Allah's supreme good pleasure (ridwan) lies in the next life for all believers, while the paradise of *ma'rifa* may be granted in this life and the next to those Allah bestows it upon. For such hearts, the quest for continuous amusement is odious, unnatural, and barely comprehensible. Abul Hasan al-Shadhili was taught by his own sheikh Ibn Mashish (Allah be well pleased with them):

> The best of spiritual works are four things after doing four other things: love of Allah, being pleased with what Allah has destined, unattachment to this world, and trust in Allah; [after] doing what Allah has made obligatory, avoiding what Allah has forbidden, the patience to mind one's own business, and the scrupulousness not to indulge in empty amusement (*Durra al-asrar* [59], 88).

Social media, chat networks, motion pictures, computer games, and so forth reduce life to the size of a small screen. They directly reverse the effect of dhikr, which is to expand the soul's horizons to the Divine. The less one has to do with them, the stronger the dhikr. They bend the *fitra*, and it can become so bent that it is no longer possible to straighten, even with the best sheikh and best tariqa. When they reach the level of emotional dependence, one has a problem. As 'Arīf al-Yamani said, "Of Allah's turning away from a servant is to occupy him with what does not benefit him."

Yet media remain a two-edged sword. Communication may conduce to some good end, such as organizing others around a worthy common purpose—or it may simply be an opportunity for show-and-tell about one's *nafs*. The former is permitted in the spiritual path, though its benefit to the soul is often slight; while the latter should be shunned because it merely inflates the ego. The following are rules of thumb for everyone connected with the spiritual way:

1. As an absolute rule, shun the offensive or unlawful: it pours acid on the roots of one's *suluk* or spiritual travel.

2. Realize that wasting time on anything without a genuine this-worldly or otherworldly benefit is *makruh* or offensive in the shari'a, not merely permissible.

3. Use digital social media only for some real benefit that is unattainable without them.

4. Engage in them and other Internet activities no more than two hours a day.

5. Have as little to do as possible with all pictures, meaning recorded images of animate life, by one's own choice. Only use them when others want one to if there is no alternative. As a legal

dispensation, when a shari'a-countenanced interest such as keeping up family ties from a remote country, or live online instruction, cannot be comparably met by some picture-free alternative, one may consider live, instantaneously transmitted, unrecorded images, like those of a webcam, to be legally closer to a mirror (which is halal) than to a recorded picture (which is haram).

6. Live online discussions by any means should follow these same guidelines and only be used when needed, not for useless gossip, which is *makruh*.

7. Online videos conveying lectures, necessary teaching demonstrations of complex manual skills or similar otherwise-difficult techniques to master, or information that requires showing, not just telling, should be used only to the extent that is needed and genuinely facilitates one's work, study, or life.

8. Do not let others record one teaching and so forth on such media except when one's message is of considerable importance, and to use audio or printed media would distract the audience from it.

Being a parent makes it obligatory to protect one's family as well, which necessitates some further guidelines. At this writing (2011), some 90 percent of eight- to sixteen-year-olds in Western countries reportedly view pornography online. Not to mention game-addiction, cyber-dating, and endless music downloads. This is not "part of growing up." Part of growing up means a black eye on the school playground, not a brain-crippling, life-long addiction.

9. In general, families should treat the computer like a household appliance, not a source of entertainment, and only use it when they need to. Aimless surfing, chatting, and video-watching are among the many addictive online activities that waste one's life. Unfortunately, unlike television, which can be removed from the house, the computer is more like a telephone, an indispensable communication tool, and in many circles a person without an email address is someone who barely exists.

10. Disconnect as much as possible. Some parents believe that if children do not become computer-literate at an early age, they fall behind. The truth is the opposite: children who learn from

books, people, and the physical and spiritual worlds around them do far better later in life. And because everything the average user knows about computers can be learned in a day or two, most children do not need a computer until school assignments necessitate it, usually in high school.

11. Be there. Pictures, music, videos, and games are the major sources of haram activity on the Internet. The best preventative measure is to keep the computer in a central location with the screen in full view and a parent nearby. Replace headphones with speakers and do not buy children external storage devices like MP3 players, iPods, and Game Boys.

12. Make it boring. An older computer with a slower connection is fast enough for email, but not good enough for streamable and downloadable content.

13. Use parental control software and filters to eliminate objectionable material.

14. Have a computer hour. If children are old enough to be emailing and doing research for school projects, fix one hour of the day when they may use the computer.

15. Buy an encyclopedia set and read books. Keep an *Encyclopædia Britannica* in the house for adults and a *Compton's Britannica* for children. Have a good collection of books, or borrow from a public library, and read together aloud as a family for entertainment for a few minutes after supper. People in general are spellbound by a live presentation of new stories and topics.

These are minimal rules to keep the toxic waste of the *makruh* and haram in digital social media from sickening one's heart and life. As for the main idea, it is to remember Allah and free oneself from what detracts from His remembrance.

Music

On the question of music, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman was the leader of the *munshidin* or vocalists at the hadra for decades, set many of his *qasidas* to music and sang them, and taught generations of singers in Damascus the elements and refinements of traditional musical theory. But it was music produced by human voices alone, unaccompanied except by an occasional tambourine. As

for musical instruments or recordings of them, I remember that once after dinner, when a well-meaning host had put on an old gramophone recording of an early Arab singer accompanied by instrumental music and then taken it off when we objected, the sheikh said, "The reliable position is that it is unlawful." Though a musician himself, he drew the line between music that was *sung*, which is attested to by a number of *sahih* or rigorously authenticated hadiths, and music that was *played* on instruments, of which the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

> There shall be groups of people from my Umma who shall consider fornication, silk, wine, and musical instruments to be lawful: groups shall camp beside a high mountain, whom a shepherd returning to in the evening with one of their herds shall approach for something he needs, and they shall tell him, "Come back tomorrow." Allah shall destroy them in the night, bringing down the mountain upon them, and transforming others into apes and swine until the Day of Judgement (*Bukhari* [17], 7.138: 5590. S).

The punishment named in the hadith is a clear proof of the unlawfulness of each of the things mentioned in it. This hadith is not part of the main text of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, but is rather of those appended to the *Sahih* by Bukhari *ta'liqan* or 'by way of commentary,' meaning hadiths, generally given together with the chapter headings, that are not always at the same level as the rigorously authenticated (sahih) ones, but may include the *hasan* or well authenticated as well, which Bukhari mentioned to clarify or expand on the hadiths of his main corpus. But this particular hadith *is* rigorously authenticated. The hadith master (*hafidh*, someone who has memorized at least 100,000 hadiths) Ibn al-Salah states:

> Ibn Hazm claimed that its chain of transmission was dissevered between Bukhari and Hisham ibn 'Ammar [al-Sulami, d. 245/868, whom Bukhari quoted it from], and considered this a rebuttal of the hadith as evidence that musical instruments were unlawful. He was wrong about this, in a number of ways. The hadith is rigorously authenticated (sahih), and

known to have a contiguous chain of transmission meeting the requirements of the most rigorous authentication (*Fath al-Bari* [7], 10.52: 5590).

The hadith is thus a fully authenticated proof of the unlawfulness of music produced by instruments. This is also the recorded position of all four madhhabs of Sunni jurisprudence: the Hanafi school (*Radd al-muhtar* [43], 5.253), the Maliki school (*al-Sharh al-saghir* [22], 2.502), the Shafi'i school (*Minhaj al-talibin* [80], 152), and the Hanbali school (*Kashshaf al-qina'* [16], 5.170). Those acquainted with fiqh literature know that each of these works is a relied-upon fatwa resource in its school. While it is true that certain Ottoman muftis made exceptions from this general rule on music, it was only under special circumstances of necessity considered pressing enough to warrant making an exception, such as with military bands, which they argued should be excepted from the prohibition because of the need to rouse the army when marching into battle.

Certain muftis also gave fatwas that the exceptionalness of the spiritual states of the Sufis in their sessions of dhikr made it lawful for them to listen to musical instruments. This they said was because the reason for Allah's prohibiting musical instruments was that they distract the heart from Allah, while in sessions of dhikr, they *remind* the heart of Him. Though this position has been adopted in the past by such tariqas as the Mevlevis in Asia Minor and the Chishtis in South Asia, the argument behind such fatwas is unconvincing not only because the shari'a should apply to all Muslims equally, but also and most importantly because we cannot establish beyond a reasonable doubt that "distracting from Allah" is the *only* reason for music's prohibition, in order to negate the prohibition in situations where it apparently does not do so. There may well be other reasons for its prohibition, or no "reason" at all besides obedience (ta'abbud) to Allah, as in many other shari'a rulings. Certainly, the ineffable beauty of the Koran is lost and its impact blunted on hearts stuffed with music, and the first thing someone does who is turning to Allah with his heart and his life is to get rid of his music collection.

The wishful distinction of still other muftis in our day be-

tween musical recordings, which they say are halal, and live sessions of music, which they say are haram, is not based on any reliable principle. If you ask anyone buying recorded music what he is paying for, he will say, "Music," because that is what it is. This is why recordings earn many times more today than live performances.

Taqwa for the salik consists in drawing the line of the halal and haram in music where it has been drawn by the vast majority of Muslim scholars from the beginning of Islam: between that which is sung by voices alone or accompanied merely by a tambourine (daff)—and that which is otherwise. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Verily you will never leave anything for fear of Allah save that Allah will give you better than it" (*Ahmad* [52], 5.78: 20739. S).

Restaurants

Restaurants are a *rukhsa* or 'resort to a legal dispensation' for the salik rather than anything recommended. Restaurant culture is to live to eat, while a Sufi eats to live, and lives for Allah. They enjoyed little luster in Islamic history or culture because the idea of going out to eat in public in front of strangers was essentially alien to traditional Muslim values of home, hospitality, privacy of family and guests, and the blessedness of food prepared by the righteous for the sake of Allah. In the modern day, when habitual, they are a hazard to health, waste money, and coarsen the heart with *ghafla*. The "atmosphere" of a good restaurant is far from Allah.

One should put baraka in one's life by eating halal food from the work of one's own hands. The best food is that which one's family prepares with a heart grateful to Allah. One should eat at least one meal daily as a family together at home. Otherwise, one should always try to eat the food of the righteous. Restaurants, coffee shops, and fast-food places are showcases of gluttony, *nafs*, and worldliness. They should only be used in unpremeditated cases that are not for the enjoyment of the self but for others, and not for love of the fare or socializing but because there are pressing needs such as:

1. Being on a journey or away from home, when unable to bring food;
2. For business meetings, or privacy not found elsewhere;
3. When relatives are having a family function;
4. When one's wife is too exhausted or fed up to cook;
5. Or guests arrive unexpectedly, and there is no food.

In such circumstances, it is sufficient that the food be halal, and that one say "Bismi Llah" over it. Otherwise, when one sees tariqa members, even long-term, eating by preference at restaurants and similar places, one should realize that they are following their *nafs* rather than the guidance of their path. How many a murid has stumbled because of food, not knowing what hit him. How many has stayed the same for years because he ignored the basics.

Whoever tries for himself will find baraka in the food prepared or sold by good people, and little baraka in the food of others. If sheikhs differ as to why, in practice they agree with the early Sufi Abu Bakr al-Duqqi, who said:

> The stomach is a place where foods commingle. When you throw the lawful into it, the outward limbs proceed to do good works. When you throw the legally doubtful into it, your path to Allah becomes filled with doubts. And when you throw something into it connected with the unlawful, there is a barrier between you and the command of Allah (*al-Kawakib al-duriyya* [72], 2.128).

Everyone knows that unslaughtered meat is haram to eat, but few realize how little baraka there is in even slaughtered meat when the animals have been raised in misery and suffering, or when cooked by those of indifferent morals. One should be aware of what one is doing to oneself. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "The Black Stone [in the Kaaba] descended from paradise whiter than milk, but was blackened by the sins of the children of Adam [who touched it]" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 2.389–90: 892. S)—indicating that people's spiritual states have a palpable effect on what they handle and touch. A cook at a restaurant who has nothing to think about but employees of the

opposite sex cannot produce food nearly as good for one's *suluk* as that prepared at home. Food prepared in heedlessness of Allah prompts heedlessness of Allah. There is such a thing as baraka in food.

Legal Dispensations from Stricter Rulings

The topic of pastimes, entertainment, arts, and restaurants for those in the tariqa would be incomplete without a discussion of taking the easier way of *rukhsa* or 'dispensation' when confronted with two legal alternatives, as opposed to taking the more rigorous way of *'azima* or strictness. The former is generally intended by Allah to meet extraordinary circumstances of difficulty in one's religion, survival, sanity, progeny, or property—while the latter, *'azima*, is what has been originally legislated in Sacred Law for ordinary circumstances.

Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said, "Every good deed that produces no light, do not deem it to merit any reward; and every ill deed that produces fear and flight, do not deem it to entail any woe of sin." For those trained in taqwa, the way of *'azima* for the sake of Allah normally produces light in the heart, while the way of *rukhsa* for the sake of the *nafs* normally produces darkness and emptiness. For this reason, the Sufis of earliest times were unanimous in preferring *'azima* in the situations in which they could. Yusuf ibn al-Husayn said, "When you see a murid using dispensations, know that nothing will ever come of him." And Ibrahim al-Qirmisini said, "Whoever wants to be cut short and no longer be able to accomplish anything, let him follow dispensations."

Allah has given free choice in some situations between doing or not doing the *'azima* that has been originally legislated for them. Hamza ibn 'Amr said: "O Messenger of Allah, I find the strength in myself to fast when I am journeying. Is that blameworthy in me?" And the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "It [postponing the fast until no longer travelling] is a dispensation from Allah. So whoever takes it, it is well; and whoever wishes to fast bears no blame" (*Muslim* [74], 2.790: 1121(5). S). And he said (Allah bless him and give him peace), "Verily Allah loves for His dispensations to be taken, just as He

hates for His disobedience to be committed" (*Ahmad* [52], 2.108: 5877. s).

Similarly in obliging ordinary Muslims not at the level of ijtihad to follow the mujtahid, Allah has given free choice as to which mujtahid may be followed on any particular legal question. It is not obligatory to follow one particular Imam on all legal questions. This said, if one looks at the awliya of all Muslim climes and times, almost all of them without exception have followed a particular school of fiqh—Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, or Hanbali—as have the vast consensus of Sunni Muslims since the times when the Imams first compiled the fiqh they took from the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) through the Sahaba, their students, and those after. Whoever follows one of the four schools is following Allah and the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). Moreover, by following one school with as few exceptions as possible—unless to take a more rigorous ruling from another school by way of greater precaution, or one of the other reasons to be mentioned below—taqwa can take root in the heart, grow, and become *wilaya* or sanctity, as the lives of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil, Hajji Baba, and others attest.

Otherwise, when one makes one's religion a shopping cart of varying scholarly opinions, one remains firmly in the grip of the *nafs*, which does all the choosing, and taqwa seldom happens. Many today claim to be mujtahids with no need for a madhhab or 'school of jurisprudence'; some speak well and mention Islamic knowledge, but look at them as one may, in few does one find any scent of *wilaya*, or often even taqwa.

Whoever wants a clear way to Allah should learn a madhhab of fiqh and live according to it. If rulings need to be taken from another school, one should familiarize oneself with the necessary conditions for this from sections c6 and w14 of *Reliance of the Traveller*; or study them oneself with a traditional scholar from original legal sources. It remains to mention below some acceptable reasons for the salik to take rulings from another school that may be considered dispensations which Allah loves:

1. Giving other people the benefit of the doubt (husn al-dhann

bi al-nas). This is one of the most important skills to master in the path, and consists in finding a dispensation for the acts of others, particularly ordinary Muslims without much learning, to interpret them in the light of permissibility. When one is not certain that an action is concurred upon between all schools as blameworthy, such as drinking or cruelty or slander, one should say to oneself, "Perhaps there is a madhhab that permits it"—unless it is plainly bad and wrong. Muslims with more learning or who have a tariqa should normally be reminded of what is better, if one has the knowledge. The opposite, learning fiqh to put oneself up by putting others down, lenient on the self with dispensations, punctilious and severe on others without exception or dispensation, is one of the swiftest ways to destroy one's path and one's *din*.

2. To reach consensus between all four schools (khuruj min khilaf). A Maliki or Hanafi might adopt the stricter criterion of the Shafi'i school for what counts as "facing" the qibla. The Maliki and Hanafi schools permit a fairly wide margin of error, while the Shafi'i school demands the most direct line towards the Kaaba that is within an ordinary person's usual capacity of exactitude. Here, the Shafi'i school's more stringent criterion is valid for all four legal schools, though not vice versa.

3. Performing a supererogatory devotional work (fadila) not valid in one's own school by following another. One might pray two rak'as of the *salat al-shukr* or prayer of gratitude, valid in the Maliki school but not in the others, after eating, as the disciples of Abu Madyan used to do. Or a Maliki intending *i'tikaf* or 'spiritual retreat in a mosque' only for as long as he is there for the prayer, as is valid in the Hanafi and Shafi'i schools but not the Maliki, in which a valid *i'tikaf* must last at least a day and a night.

4. Taking a position from another school that is religiously more precautionary (ahwat fi al-din) than that required by one's own. A Shafi'i or Hanafi, for example, might adopt the position of those of the Maliki school who hold that presence of heart with Allah, if only for a moment, is an obligatory element (farida) for the validity of the prayer; and repeat any of his own prescribed

prayers that are without even this bare minimum. This is typical of Sufis in everything.

5. The persuasiveness of the primary scriptural evidence for a ruling (rujhan al-dalil). Here "persuasiveness" means for the alim whom Allah has given the light of perspicacity, tawfiq, and intelligence; someone who has studied fiqh and its evidentiary bases with godfearing ulema, not merely personal readings, for a considerable part of his life while following the path of taqwa. There were numbers of such scholars among the early Sufis, if perhaps fewer in latter times. An example is the position adopted centuries ago by Shafi'is in Hadramawt, Yemen, contrary to the received ruling of their school, that fruit and crops fertilized with manure do not thereby become 'affected with filth' (najis). This is the position of the Hanafi school, for whom the means of purifying something which was originally filth (najasa) include its being 'transformed,' which they term *istihala*, in three ways: in name, use, and physical form. It is thereby possible to understand how molecules once assembled as "filth" may afterwards disperse and return to a reality known as "soil" that no longer bears the characteristic name, use, or physical form of filth, and by Allah's command has actually been changed into something pure. The surface of the earth is admixed with countless molecules that have passed through countless forms of animate life, and only through the legal validity and reality of transformation (istihala) is it readily apparent how, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "The earth has been made for me a purifying substance [i.e. dust usable in dry ablution (tayammum)] and a mosque [lit. "a place of prostration in prayer"]" (*Muslim* [74], 1.371: 523. S); and in another version, "The whole earth has been made for me and for my Umma a mosque and a purifying substance (tahur); so wherever the prayer may find any man of my Umma, he has his mosque and his purification right there with him" (*Ahmad* [52], 5.248: 22137. SG). Someone convinced through his own trained legal judgement (ijtihad) that such a ruling is that of Allah is who is meant by the words of Imam al-Juwayni and others "Someone sufficiently learned (alim) may not merely follow the scholarship of another [without knowing his

proof and agreeing with it]" (*al-Waraqat* [64], 14). Ibn al-'Arabi may have reached such a degree, though because there is no consensus on it like the consensus of the Umma on the four Imams of fiqh, legal judgements reached through his own ijtihad, if valid, are so for himself alone.

6. Borrowing a dispensation from another school out of severe need (haja), necessity (darura), or unavoidability ('umum al-balwa). A Shafi'i, whose ablution (wudu) is vitiated by touching a member of the opposite sex, even accidentally, might follow the Hanafi position that it is not, during his obligatory circumambulation (tawaf) on the hajj. The crowding around the Kaaba at that time makes it hard to complete the circumambulation without a foot or arm accidentally touching that of a member of the opposite sex, and it would otherwise be difficult indeed for him to keep his ablution until he finished his obligatory circumambulation for hajj. Or for a Hanbali—aware of the ubiquitous use of unslaughtered cow parts in more than four hundred common products in North America, many of them by no means easily detectable, such as the slick paper used in magazines—to take the dispensation from the Hanafi school that *istihala* or transformation, discussed just above, makes such substances pure.

7. Greater focus on Allah (hudur). Someone whose own school holds the sunna prayers associated with the five prescribed prayers to always be superior at home might follow the Hanafi position that they are better in the mosque, on occasions when he knows that because of guests, children, or remodeling, for example, prayers at home are unlikely to be as spiritually focused as those at the mosque. Or someone occasionally finding greater presence of heart looking straight ahead in prayer towards the qibla as Malikis do, rather than looking down, as in other schools.

8. Following the *tarbiya* of one's sheikh and tariqa (iqtida). Someone in the Shadhili tariqa would necessarily participate in the hadra, which scholars of the Shafi'i and other schools hold recommended, even if there are others who do not. If even after a time one feels uncomfortable with a position valid in another madhhab that is a main *tarbiya* element of one's own tariqa, one should either change one's opinion or change one's tariqa. The

relative merit of following the more precautionary in religion (ahwat fi al-din) discussed in (4) above is not relevant here, because it is not comparable to the merit of finding oneself with Allah, which is the normal outcome of one's trajectory in a tariqa.

9. Finally, one may follow another school on a question, as Sheikh al-Kurdi mentioned some sheikhs had their murids do once or twice in a lifetime, in order to acknowledge the validity, correctness, and parity in Allah's sight of the other madhhabs with one's own. This typically grates on the *nafs*, and is to remedy unconscious bigotry, so is generally only at the command of one's sheikh.

THE aim in each of these examples of taking from another school is not merely the ease or pleasure of the *nafs*, but to help one's worship of Allah. When this is the motive for taking a dispensation, one may hope it is of those Allah loves to be taken. Otherwise, the rule of the tariqa for pastimes, art, media, restaurants, and fatwas on the halal and haram is the maxim of Ibn 'Ata Illah "When two matters seem confusing to you, consider which is the heavier on the self and follow it; for nothing weighs upon it but what is true" (*al-Hikam* [49], 55: 192).

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

THE importance of marriage to one's tariqa is plain from the tremendous impact of *suhba* or companionship on the spiritual traveller. Every Muslim understands that a good marriage is a sunna, help, and blessing to whomever Allah gives it. From the single decision of who should be one's mate for life comes a great deal of one's future happiness or misery. In the path, few things furnish a comparable touchstone of one's taqwa and character.

Because of the dominance of powerful contemporary norms essentially alien to the *fitra* or 'true nature' of the sexes, a good marriage today is oftener something that must be sought and won than an event one can live "happily ever after." To clarify the basics, certain minimal conditions for disciples getting married have been summarized below, with key points from Imam Ghazali and others of Islamic character, adab, rights, duties, and a few practical rules necessary in our day to have a fulfilling Islamic marriage.

Getting Married

A disciple may marry anyone they want, as long as the following conditions are met:

1. To intend the marriage to fulfill the sunna for the sake of Allah, and to realize that marriage is a means, not an end. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "This world is but a passing benefit, and the best passing benefit is a righteous woman" (*Muslim* [74], 2.1090: 1467. S).

2. That the prospective spouse share one's own vision of Islam, and be religious, meaning that they follow one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence, pray the five prayers, and if female, cover correctly. They do all of this before ever hearing of marriage. Someone who doesn't pray but "comes from a good family" is absolutely unacceptable, and one must not be pressured by family members into marrying such a person. One's children could end up in hell by following their example. Men should esteem the baraka of a wife who has a tariqa.

3. That the prospective spouse agree that the household will be run according to one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence in all matters; if Hanafi, for example, that there be nothing unlawful according to the school in any of the family's dealings.

4. That the prospective spouse know that one has a tariqa and sheikh and what this entails, knows and agrees that one goes to the weekly dhikrs and yearly Suhbas or convocations in particular countries, and that one's main interest is Allah. If the person also has a tariqa, it must be an authentic one, meaning at minimum that the sheikh and disciple know that the Sacred Law is above the sheikh, disciple, and everyone else.

5. That the husband be the man of the family. The way of the prophets, the Sufi sheikhs, and of Islam, is that the man leads, supports, guides, and takes care of his wife and family. Allah says, "Men are keepers over women, because Allah has favored the one above the other, and because they expend of their wealth: So righteous women are worshipful, faithfully guarding their honor when their husbands are gone, as Allah has guarded them" (Koran 4:34). A man does not throw his weight around with meaningless orders, yet is not the obsequious follower of the woman Allah has made him keeper of. He rather asks Allah to guide him in his decisions, listens to what wisdom his wife may offer, and then follows his own judgement, returning especially in the big decisions to his *istikhara*. A man should *tell* his wife what he is going to do, not ask her permission.

6. That the wife be the woman of the family. There is a lot of bad advice around today about marriage that is far from any meaningful appreciation of men's and women's complementary

natures. For a marriage to work the man must feel respected by his wife, and the woman feel loved by her husband. In previous ages of Islamic history, there was no need to advise anyone about the roles of men and women. But in our times, current cultural myths consider men and women interchangeable, forbid men to be men, and on the ground, few wives can look up for very long to the sapless males the theories have created. Presently accepted rules of behavior between men and women are merely adequate for how long most marriages today actually last.

We advise ladies in the tariqa to read and apply Helen Andelin's *Fascinating Womanhood*, which contains the best description of the *akhlaq* or 'proper way of handling oneself' necessary for any woman who wants her marriage to succeed. Some of its remarks about the bedroom and women's education are inapplicable in an Islamic context, but these are easily distinguished from the rest, and everyone who has followed the book has found that it works. Ladies find that once they start acting femininely, their men are able to respond with a manly sense of loving and protecting a woman. Women in the tariqa have also found a lot of benefit from *The Surrendered Wife*. A third work is *Happy Housewives*, especially useful for women affected by modern corporate values, though the author's diction is occasionally indelicate.

If tempted by divorce, a woman should remember that it is usually a bad solution, that married couples tear apart rather than come apart, that most women after feeling relieved for a few months wish they had never got divorced, and that when there are children, one can never really get the other parent out of one's life. It is haram for the parent who keeps the children to turn their hearts against the other parent. Because of a woman's superior feminine insight into the emotional dimensions of life and love, the solution for many marriage problems lies in her hands rather than her husband's, and she is recommended to read, after the titles above, the works on marriage and divorce by Michelle Weiner-Davis, and the twenty-five-year-long landmark study of the effects of divorce on children published under the title *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce*. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "The most hateful of lawful things to Allah

Most High is divorce" (*Abu Dawud* [94], 2.255: 2178. D). To end a marriage in divorce is only an acceptable solution when to stay married would entail great harm or suffering, or committing ongoing haram.

7. That the husband have a lawful income by which he can support a wife and free her from the need to work, providing for her a *bayt shar'i* or 'home as guaranteed by Sacred Law,' meaning her own house or self-contained part of a house, which she runs, and has complete security in and everything else she needs, according to the standard enjoyed in her father's house. It means she has an autonomous privacy not subject to her husband's family entering at will or meddling with her. This said, an intelligent wife understands from the first that she cannot separate her husband from his family, so she uses diplomacy with her in-laws, to make them feel welcome in her house as guests. A woman who turns her husband's heart against his mother, so he ceases to regard her and never visits her, has committed a great crime, and should repent to Allah and make amends. If she doesn't get along with her in-laws or suffers harm from them, the husband can visit them himself at their home. If a man in the tariqa wants to get married, he has to be able to provide all this. Otherwise, he is not ready for marriage, and should save his money and make plans for the future, with Allah's help. One need not obey parents' demands to marry if one is unable to provide a wife with these basic rights guaranteed by Sacred Law, unless the wife knows that her living situation will involve forgoing some of them and she completely accepts.

Because of its many challenges, some sheikhs of the path have preferred a disciple wait to marry until he has achieved a sound footing in the tariqa for a few years, meaning that taqwa and Iman have become his mode of thinking. New converts to Islam too, who often hear well-meant advice from other Muslims about promptly getting married, should practice their religion and adjust to it for a year or two before taking on the additional challenges of marriage. If one is single and suffers from temptation, one may request the "Settling One's Grounds" program from the sheikh or *muqaddam*.

Anyone who marries someone meeting these seven conditions marries with the sheikh's complete blessing and best wishes, although there is baraka in seeking his permission, and tremendous good in marrying a spouse in the tariqa who is serious about their *suluk*. Among the more important adab leading up to marriage are the following:

Looking for a Good Wife

The qualities praised by the sunna in a prospective wife are that she be religious, intelligent, amiable and well-mannered, fertile (as inferable from her mother or female relatives), from a good family, a virgin, pleasing in appearance, undesirous of an exorbitant marriage payment (mahr), and not a close family relative.

When seeking to marry a woman, one should make one's intention for Allah, then send someone, preferably a family member, to her family to ask for a chaperoned meeting with her. The messenger should be someone who will honestly tell them how one is. One should inquire about the prospective bride from a religious and reliable informant, not for example someone who bears malicious tales between people (namima). Women are better to send, as they normally notice family details more closely than men, and can meet with her and her female family members. One should ask about her religiousness, her diligence in prayer and fasting, her shyness, reserve, and modesty, her personal cleanliness, her chasteness of speech, whether she stays at home, and how well she respects her parents. One should ask about the character of her father, and about her mother's behavior, religion, and works, for often in marriage, "Like mother, like daughter."

It is then a key sunna for one to personally meet the woman, to sit and talk with her as many times as it takes to make up one's mind about marriage. The man and woman should make sure they communicate well, are comfortable with one another, are inclined towards each other, and are on the same page in their religion. One should not admire in a woman qualities admirable only in a man. It is better to avoid the overly "academic type" of girl whose mother has waited on her all her life at home with every conceivable labor to free her to study, so that she never

learned how to work, cook, clean, run a house, take care of children, or make a home comfortable. There is much misplaced confidence by some parents today in "good schools" that do not provide students with skills fundamental to life, and which they themselves in consequence have not taught them either. Nor should a prospective spouse come from a dysfunctional family, broken home, or household dominated by an aggressive mother. If a family seems a bit off, it usually is. If the prospective bride has debts, one must think of how they will be paid. One should pray *istikhara* a few times after learning everything one can about her.

Being Asked For

Much of the preceding advice may be equally given to the woman whose hand is sought in marriage. She should send a reliable informant to ask about the man's madhhab, his religiousness, his taqwa, tenets of faith, personal manliness and respectability, and whether he is true to his word. She should ask about his family and relatives, his group affiliations, who visits him, how diligently he keeps the prayer, and his moral rectitude at work.

The man must know how to work. He should be financially responsible, and have successfully held down a job for some time working, preferably for someone besides his father. The man must be religious, not high-handed, arrogant, sinful, or have heretical views. He should not be spoiled, meaning self-centered, quick to anger, and in need of instant gratification of his whims. A mama's boy should be shunned. In our times, he should be free of addictions, meaning not only to illicit substances, but to pornography, gaming, blogging, endless surfing online, restauranting, the entertainment industry, the various forms of adrenaline addiction, and the host of vices purveyed by the Internet to the profit of a few and ruin of many. Addictions destroy marriages. A prospective wife should not hope to rehabilitate a man, but should marry someone she can live with, realizing that with few exceptions, "what you see is what you get."

She should want him for his religion rather than his wealth, and the way he conducts his life rather than his fame. She should

resolve to live with him contentedly within their means and to obey his commands, for that ensures affection and love.

A sin that often brings unlooked-for misfortune in marriage is revealing one's sins to another. In Islam mentioning any of one's past sins is itself a sin. Allah has commanded us to hide all acts of disobedience, except when that would lead to actual harm to another. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said, "Whoever conceals the faults of a Muslim, Allah will conceal his faults in this world and the next" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2074: 2699. S). This includes one's own sins, and "conceals" means from one's spouse, prospective spouse, or anyone else. It includes previous illicit sex, which is haram to mention and obligatory to conceal, even by deception if necessary. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

> All of my Umma shall be forgiven, except those who commit iniquities openly. Verily, "open indecency" includes a man committing an act by night, and then in the morning when Allah has concealed what he did, saying, "O So-and-so, last night I did such and such." He spent the night, his Lord having concealed what he did; and when morning came, he pulled aside the veil of Allah (*Bukhari* [17], 8.24: 6069. S).

In Islam, to mention a sin is itself a sin. Imam Nawawi mentions this hadith under the rubric of "the prohibition of pulling aside the cover from one's sins" (*Sharh Muslim* [75], 18.119). How many a person was unable to resist telling a friend or a spouse about sins they committed in their previous life, and Allah punished them with contempt in the other's heart that could never be effaced, because there is no baraka in the haram. All of which refers to sins now finished, as opposed to ongoing habitual problems such as addictions, which the person asked about must truthfully disclose to a prospective marriage partner, since, like defects in a spouse that permit annulment of marriage, addictions ruin marriages, and the partner must know about them in advance to reach an informed decision.

The Wedding

When a man decides to marry a woman, they should keep the

interval between the signing of the contract and the wedding day as brief as possible, certainly not more than a space of months. At the wedding, he does not kiss the bride in front of her family. The groom should be manly and firm, not allowing unreligious family members to plan anything at the wedding or reception that will take away the marriage's tawfiq, or anger Allah, or shame them on the Last Day, such as music, alcohol, mixing of the sexes, wasteful extravagance, or other matters some people today take for granted. The groom should simply tell everyone he refuses to come to such a wedding. They are unlikely to have it without him.

Family Rights and Roles

Abul Hasan al-Shadhili related from his sheikh 'Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish:

> There are two ill deeds that even a great many good deeds can seldom have any benefit with: bitterness over Allah's destining, and wronging Allah's servants. And there are two good deeds that even a great many ill deeds can seldom do any harm with: acceptance of Allah's destining, and forgiveness of Allah's servants (*Durra al-asrar* [59], 88).

Few things cause so much bitterness and wrong as disregarding the rights of family. A murid who wants to be close to Allah must observe the rights, duties, and adab of dealing with family members.

The Husband

A man should be his wife's intimate friend, pleasant and courteous in speech, show her love and affection, and be relaxed and informal when they are alone. He should not put her down, but overlook occasional missteps, forgive mistakes, defend her honor, seldom argue with her, honor her family, continually promise her the best, and have the manly jealousy to keep things between her and other men from exceeding the permissible limits.

He should be calm and chivalrous with her, polite, patient, and tender, and know how to dispel tensions and arguments with jokes, ridiculous asides, and amorous advances. A man has no

need to prove he is tough, but should always mean what he says, and not humor his wife's whims or be so soft-hearted or indulgent that he worsens her character and turns her into a domineering tyrant. To do so is a devastating mistake that ruins a great many marriages in our times, and the last forty years or so of the unisex experiment have sufficiently proved that unisex does not work. If she has no adab or respect for him, he should send her back to her family until she wants to be a wife. If he sees something ethically wrong, he should be grave and critical. He should be moderate and fair, buying her gifts and flowers, paying admiring compliments, and spending ungrudgingly on her necessities. He is neither stingy, nor wastefully lavish in buying things of little enjoyment or benefit. He should leave the house to work during the day or study, even if wealthy or retired, because it is difficult for most wives to respect a husband who hangs around the house.

If a man has two wives, he should be strictly equitable in time, attention, and advantages to both, and not let one bully or enamor him into being unfair to the other. Imam Shafi'i regarded such equity as so difficult for most people to attain that marriage to more than one wife is religiously "better to avoid" (khilaf al-awla) under ordinary circumstances: meaning except, for example, when there are pressing medical reasons or the like. Shafi'i's position is borne out by the word of Allah "You shall never be able to be completely fair between wives, however much you want to; So do not incline so wholly towards one that you leave the other one hanging; And if you put matters right and prevent unfairness, verily Allah is oft-forgiving, all-compassionate" (Koran 4:129). Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman and Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil used to warn anyone who would listen against taking a second wife, and it is plain from instance after instance that whoever marries a second wife in our day usually opens up a can of worms on himself. The social norms that once made it possible no longer seem to exist.

As a Muslim man, a husband should be clean in dress, make frequent use of the breath-freshening tooth-stick (siwak), and wear clothes neither intended to draw attention nor yet mean and

shabby. He does not keep the hem of his garment low out of pride, or high to appear ascetic. He attends the Friday prayer, always prays in a group, and does much dhikr and worship. He does not stare around him while walking, look at other women than his wife, sit on the doorstep of his house with neighbors, or talk too much with his friends about his wife and what takes place in his home.

The Wife

A woman should be her husband's friend, while keeping a respectful shyness towards him, avoiding arguing with him, obeying his word in everything lawful. She should hold her peace when he speaks, keep his honor when he is away, and not treacherously take his property. She should smell pleasant, care well for her teeth and clothes, be content with her standard of living, be tender, loving and caring, and keep up her appearance. A woman who tries to be the man of the house will generally find her house someday without a man. She should honor her husband's family and relatives, be appreciative of him, accept his deeds with gratitude, and show him her happiness when she sees him. When children come, she should give her husband first priority and attention rather than her children. Many wives err in this in our times, abetted by a spate of paperback books that urge baby-adoration with names like "attached parenting," and they find themselves astonished and dismayed when their husbands eventually get tired of being ignored, spend increasingly long hours away from home for work or any other excuse, and begin talking about divorce or getting a second wife. Men in such a situation are extremely susceptible to the admiration and attention of other women, particularly at work, because they lack any at home, where it is all being given to the children. These signs of discontent are often her last warning to change.

As a Muslim woman, she should prefer to be in her own home, taking care of her house and children, making sure that both are clean and orderly. She should learn her religion to properly practice it and raise her children Islamically. A woman devoted to academic or career achievement should leave marriage and family

to those with the time for it, because she will not be able to give them their due. A Muslim woman's ambition should lie in perfecting herself. She should faithfully perform her prayer and fasting, study her own faults, and think of her religion. She should speak little, not waste time on pointless conversations, and lower her gaze. She should be vigilant of her Lord, make much dhikr, encourage her husband to earn the halal, and not ask for a lot of gifts from him. She should be shy and modest, neither harsh or coarse in word, have fortitude, be thankful, prefer others to herself, and be generous with herself and her efforts. If a friend of her husband calls when he is not at home, she does not admit him, ask him what he wants, or converse with him at length—out of jealousy for her honor and that of her husband.

To benefit from changes in life, spiritual travellers must be with Allah, not their own story line. When a young woman marries, for example, she suddenly finds herself not only with another ego in the house to live with, but within a short space, that the comparative ease and calm of her younger days have been swept away by the sheer work needed to keep up and think of everything in a real home. When she has her first baby, she must manage for another life even more dependent on her personal sacrifices. By the second, third, or fourth child, her days and nights belong almost entirely to others. Whether she has a spiritual path or not, such a mother can seldom resist a glance at the past, when there were more prayers, more meanings, more spiritual company, and more serenity. When Allah opens her understanding, she will see that she is engaged in one of the highest forms of worship, that of producing new believers who love and worship Allah. She is effectively worshipping Allah for as many lifetimes she has children, for the reward of every spiritual work her children do will be hers, without this diminishing anything of their own rewards: every ablution, every prayer, every Ramadan, every hajj, and even the works her children will in turn pass on to their offspring, and, so on till the end of time. Even if her children do not turn out as she wishes, she shall be requited in paradise forever according to her intention in raising them, which was that they should be godly.

Aside from the tremendous reward, within the path itself it is noticeable that many of those who benefit most from the khalwa are women who have raised children. With only a little daily dhikr and worship over the years, but much toil and sacrifice for others, they surpass many a younger person who has had more free time, effort, and "spiritual works." What they find is greater because their state with Allah is greater; namely, the awe, hope, and love of the Divine they have realized by years of sincerity to Him.

Children

When children are born, parents should remember that their children do not belong to them, but to Allah, who has reposited them with them as a trust, to raise to be good Muslims who will gain eternal happiness. Parents' love for their children should be unconditional and not based on their achievements in life, but their rules for them should be equally unconditional: clear, unwavering, and enforced with unvarying discipline.

Parents should help their children be kind and respectful to them by not being harsh, bullying, obsessed with worldly achievement, or imposing more on them than they can bear. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Whoever harms, Allah harms; and whoever makes hardship for another, Allah makes hardship for him" (*al-Mustadrak* [38], 2.58. 8). Parents should raise their children for Allah and think of the children's benefit, not merely their own.

Parents should make Islam something beloved in their children's hearts by loving it themselves. They should give them two examples of halals for every haram. They should not favor one child above others. Gifts, praise, and attention should be given equally between all. Parents should not compare children with one another within their hearing to the favor of one and disadvantage of the other. Father and mother should never fight or argue in front of the children. Parents should never throw temper tantrums or use harmful violence against family members, for these are transmitted from generation to generation by the bad example of parents, and predecessors bear the sin of all who follow them therein.

A father must be around to show his children by precept and example what a man is. Children raised without a man in the house are greatly disadvantaged. A father should not spend night after night "out with the boys" away from his family, but realize they are a trust from Allah, and that children do not raise themselves.

It is not permissible, but a crime against a child to spoil him. If the child learns hardiness, self-sacrifice, and patience, he will have the emotional means to succeed in life. A child who is the center of his parents' doting seldom turns out to be good for anything else. If parents see that their children share things with others, do not throw tantrums, sit quietly when told to, respect elders, and obey their father and mother—in a word, have good character—they should thank Allah for their tawfiq. But if their children are badly behaved and selfish, parents should realize they are not succeeding, and have the humility to ask parents of well-behaved children what they do. Someone is always in control of a situation, and if it is the child, it is the worse for parents and child alike. Well-behaved children benefit far more from the adult world around them because everyone wants to help them, while spoiled children are universally detested, and everyone is relieved when they disappear. Neglecting discipline is equally neglect; and over-indulged children, like other victims of neglect, grow up unable to hold down a job, succeed in marriage, or live normal lives. How many a parent gave their child everything it wanted, counting on its eternal gratitude, only to find that their ill-bred child later had no use for them either; while those who disciplined their child for Allah found their efforts rewarded in this world and the next.

Parents

A child, even when grown up, should heed his parents, rise when they stand, and obey their commands in everything lawful that does not cause harm to himself or his family. He should respond to their invitations, and not exasperate them with insistence or remind them of any kindness or matter he has taken care of for them. He should not regard them dismissively, or refuse their

behest. He should provide generously for them when in need, and in their infirmity of years, he should "lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy" (Koran 17:24).

To summarize, a good marriage is for Allah. He shows His favor to such a marriage by success, harmony, and happiness between family members. The key is good character. Dhul Nun was asked, "Who among men is the most plagued by trouble?" and he answered, "The worst of them in character (akhlaq)." When asked, "What is the mark of bad character?" he replied, "Always disagreeing." I was once visiting Sheikh Nuh al-Qudah at his home in Zarqa in the 1980s, when a man came in and spoke of long, bitter conflicts between a husband and wife. The sheikh listened, and finally remarked, "Thus do We consign wrongdoers to one another, for that which they would earn" [Koran 6:129]. The sovereign advice for most marriage difficulties is simply "Be *Muslims*." Were our character as Allah had commanded, our marriage and family life would be smooth sailing, which has a great deal to do with our Sufism.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

COMPANY

LLAH says, "O you who believe, fear Allah and be with those who are true" (Koran 9:119). Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman considered this a primary basis in Islam for the tariqa. One's *suhba* or friendship with others has everything to do with one's relationship with Allah. Ibn 'Ajiba says:

> Know that this knowledge we speak of is not attained by the prattling of the tongue: it is nothing but direct experiences and being wholly shaken to one's core. It cannot be taken from pages, but only from the people with the experiences. It cannot be won by gossip, but only through service to its men and keeping the company of the perfected. By Allah, no one who has succeeded at it has succeeded except by keeping the company of someone who succeeded (*Iqadh al-himam* [47], 1.8).

The path of solitude is not the path of *suluk* or spiritual development. As Abu 'Uthman al-Hiri said, "Whoever keeps company with himself, vanity is his companion; while whoever keeps the company of the awliya is given divine success to attain to the path to Allah." This is why there is a tariqa, and why the tremendous emphasis on company. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman often used to repeat the adage "Human nature takes from human nature, so choose for your company someone worshipful." Who, for example? After a few general guidelines, everyone is free to choose:

1. One should not take for one's companions those who are irreligious and do not pray. If one has such friends, then if there is not some other aim countenanced by Sacred Law in keeping their company, such as maintaining family ties, one should taper off one's dealings with them in a gentle yet effective way, such as by boring them with one's dullness until they find other friends. "It might be that you are doing badly," says Ibn 'Ata Illah, "but keeping the company of someone even worse makes you perceive that you are doing fine" (*al-Hikam* [49], 25: 44).

2. One should have as many friends among practicing Muslims as one can, which Allah has made a sunna because we don't know which of our believing friends may intercede for us on Judgement Day. This is at the level of companionship and acquaintance. Sa'id ibn Musayyab clarified the adab of such friendship with the words

> One of my brethren from among the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) wrote me saying: "Consider whatever your brother does in the best light, as long as nothing reaches you that completely convinces you otherwise. Never think evil of any word that comes from a Muslim when you can find any possible interpretation that is favorable. Whoever makes himself liable to suspicions has no one to blame but himself. Whoever keeps his secret has choice still in his hands. There is nothing with which you can pay back someone who disobeys Allah towards you like obeying Allah towards him. Hold fast to honest friends, and have many of them, for they are a fair ornament in time of ease, and a ready resource in time of dire affliction. Do not swear careless oaths, lest Allah humiliate you. Never ask about what has not been until it is. Do not put your speech except before someone who desires it. Speak the truth even if the truth slays you. Keep away from your enemy. Be cautious of your friend, except him who is trustworthy. No one is trustworthy but he who has great fear of Allah Mighty and Majestic. And take advice from those who dread their Lord though He is unseen" (*Shu'ab al-iman* [14], 6.323–24: 8345).

3. A third level is that of intimate friendship and love; and this should be reserved for those whom one wishes to absorb the state of. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "A man's religion is like that of his close friend, so let each of you look at whom he keeps close friendship with" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4. 390: 2535. H). In the case of the spiritual traveller, this means those whose state is dhikr of Allah, and one should seek out those who are both salik (travelling) and motivate one to emulate them. It is at this level that Ibn 'Ata Illah says, "Do not keep the company of someone whose state does not uplift you, or words guide you to Allah" (*al-Hikam* [49], 25: 43).

As with most human endeavors, some parts of the spiritual path are rough and some are smooth, and if the traveller cannot control this, he can control the way he handles himself in every state, and this is the meaning of the words of the sheikhs "The tariqa is all proper manners"—with Allah, one's fellow Muslims, and with those the path is taken from. We will now look at the adab or 'proper way of dealing' with those whose company is sought in the spiritual path, and with some whose company is not.

Finding a Sheikh

It is plain from the example of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman and many other sheikhs living and dead that a person should not be misled by ulema of the outward sciences, or former seekers, or others who say that there is no more Sufism in the world today. All it means is that they have never found or recognized a true sheikh, and therefore believe that no one else has. This is not only an unconvincing inference, but a problem with their tawfiq, for Allah Most High has said, "I shall deal towards My true servant as he thinks I shall" (*Bukhari* [17], 9.147–48: 7405. S), and whoever thinks Allah has closed the door may have thereby closed it on himself. Imam 'Abdullah al-Haddad has said:

> To be completely honest with each other, the only thing lacking today is genuineness (sidq) in seeking. Otherwise, true sheikhs exist, but "how unfathomably glorious is He who only guides unto His saints as a guidance unto Himself,

and only brings to them those He wants to bring to Himself [*al-Hikam* [49], 48: 156]" (*Adab suluk al-murid* [37], 55–56).

What sheikhs of previous ages intended by saying, as Abu Bakr al-Wasiti (d. after 320/932) said, "The spiritual path has gone and so have those of it, and nothing remains but regrets" was to warn seekers against cause for regrets. This is plain from the centuries after them that brought forth such sheikhs as 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561/1166), al-Ghawth Abu Madyan (d. 594/1198), Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 638/1240), Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 672/1273), al-'Arabi al-Darqawi (d. 1239/1823), Ahmad al-'Alawi (d. 1353/1934), and others for whom the path was by no means gone. What Wasiti and others intended, and Allah knows best, was first, that the path remains rare, and those capable of it few, so one should not feel complacent with one's works, but rather measure oneself against the early Sufis, and not stray from the path's essential principles (usul); and secondly, that one should beware of pretenders who do not fulfill the basic conditions of a sheikh. What exceeds this is mere *waswasa* or the whisperings of the Devil, making as it does a dead letter of Ihsan, which lies at the heart of the Islamic revelation.

A true sheikh is a manifestation of Allah's mercy and guidance. The benefits of finding one are the benefits of Sufism itself and have been extolled by Muslims throughout Islamic history. Ibn al-'Arabi merely reiterated the consensus of all Sufi masters when he said, "Whoever does not take the path from its men simply goes from one absurdity to the next" (*al-Hall al-sadid* [40], 23).

Demand among men for something valuable, however, will normally tempt at least some to try to counterfeit it, and there have been false guides, past and present, whom Sufi masters like Imam Ghazali, Qushayri, al-Sarraj al-Tusi, Ahmad al-Sirhindi, and others have warned against. There is little reason to suppose the problem has entirely disappeared in our times. The tragedy is that disciples of such pretenders waste years of their lives waiting for a bus that never arrives. Yet they bear some of the responsibility of this for following someone without the basic qualifications of a sheikh. Allah says: "By no means follow the way of those who do not know" (Koran 10:89), meaning that a guide

without firm religious knowledge is not a guide. And He says, "Faithfully follow the way of him who ever returns to Me in sincerity and repentance" (Koran 31:15), meaning that a true guide must have fear and lowliness before Allah. Other conditions are:

1. Being a Sunni Muslim with valid tenets of faith ('aqida).

2. Being an alim capable of answering most questions about what Allah expects of man without having to ask someone else, yet humble enough to ask when he does not know.

3. Having a verifiably public authorization from a true sheikh to be a sheikh, connecting him through an unbroken chain of authorization (silsila) back to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace). The success of the murshid lies in his being accepted with the awliya of his initiatic chain (maqbul al-silsila).

4. Being male, as a sheikh is an heir to the prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace), whom Allah made all males.

5. Being worthy to be taken as an exemplar in religion, not privately disobedient or wicked.

6. Knowing the basic terms of Sufism such as *fana* (annihilation), *baqa* (subsistence), *ma'rifa* (gnosis), and others by having travelled the path and personally experienced them at the hands of his sheikh.

7. Not being self-satisfied, or veiled by others' need for him from his own need for Allah.

8. Exaltation of Allah's commands in word and deed, acknowledging they are above every human being.

9. Permission from Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) above and beyond that given him by his sheikh, manifest inwardly in an unmistakable portent or sign, and outwardly in his tawfiq in inculcating in murids the perfections of Islam, Iman, and Ihsan.

10. Being destined by Allah to be the sheikh of the particular disciple, who must be able to practice the sheikh's teaching and absorb his secret from him.

These are not exhaustive, but only the most essential. Junayd said, "Whoever has not heard hadith, sat with scholars of fiqh, and taken his adab from those trained in adab corrupts whoever

follows him." Sheikh al-Kurdi used to tell his disciples, "If you see me step out of the mosque with my right foot first, stop following me." This said, no age is without true masters, and when one finds a sheikh with the above conditions, and a longing within oneself to reach Allah, one should pray *istikhara* and follow one's heart.

Taking a Sheikh

The sheikh at whose hands one has taken the spiritual path may be one or several. If the sheikh is one, and the disciple submits his spiritual development to him, the disciple is termed a salik or traveller. If the sheikh is more than one, and the disciple's heart is sometimes attached to this one and sometimes to that, the disciple is a *mutabarrik* or 'only attaining the spiritual blessing' of the way. This is not a bad thing, but the fruits are far less. For someone whose aim is to reach Allah, two sheikhs are less than one.

The sheikh is in a sense the "father" of the traveller, for it is he by the grace of Allah who will give spiritual birth to him by initiating him into the higher world, and awaken the capacity in him to know the Divine, directly and experientially. His standing in the heart and life of the disciple is based on this function. The adab appropriate to one's sheikh is widely agreed upon among masters, though in some particulars depends on his personality and the age in which he lives. At the first of my path, I was too informal on one occasion with Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, who brought me up by saying that while discipleship was not slavery, one must never have poor manners. He loaned me a copy of the *Adab al-mardiyya* [Praiseworthy manners] of Sheikh Muhammad al-Buzaydi, the servant of Mawlay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi. Though some of its rules were more rigorous than those Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman accepted, the book was profound at every level. The author asked in it that if one's natural parents who are the cause of one's appearance in this world deserve the respect unanimously accorded to them by human nature, custom, and Sacred Law, how then should one be towards someone who gives birth to one into the world of the spirit for all eternity?

What I saw in Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman over the years, in

disciples who succeeded with him, and those who fell away, was that a sheikh loves his students with Allah's own love of them. Allah says, "Verily those who believe and work righteous deeds, the All-merciful shall put tremendous love for them in men's hearts" (Koran 19:96). A sheikh also loves disciples because they are the means of his own worship of Allah through guiding them. His reward with Allah is complete from the beginning of the path, because his intention is that all should be guided to the end. By the baraka of his intention and prayers for disciples, everyone who makes *suluk* with him ends up with much more than they had to begin with, even if their steps should falter and fail, for they at least realize that the true path lies in doing what is most beneficial as long as one is alive. If they don't have a huge account, they at least open up a small one. Wahb ibn Munabbih was told of someone who gave up the tariqa after great spiritual works, and he said, "Don't be surprised at him who turns back, but at him who keeps on." This said, murids with adab are normally dearer to the sheikh, and this was probably why Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman gave me Buzaydi's book. As Ibn 'Ata Illah says:

> It is of the ignorance of a disciple to show ill manners, and when his penalty is postponed, to say, "Had this been ill manners, it would have cut off the divine aid and caused remoteness." For it might cut off the divine aid from whence he notices not, if only to prevent any increase. And he might be made remote without even realizing it—were it only to leave you and whatever you want (*al-Hikam* [49], 29–30: 66).

This maxim points up a great stumbling-block in the path, namely taking the *nafs* as one's sheikh, and comparing the sheikh's judgements with its own before following them. It does not refer to matters of conscience or the halal and haram, which are decided by the shari'a, not the sheikh; but rather to the mistake of taking one's first counsel from oneself in matters of tariqa and *din*.

Adab with One's Sheikh

Murids who have adab attain the fruits of the path. They remain

connected with the sheikh throughout his lifetime; meet, listen, and follow; absorb his *hal* of the way of Allah being the central impetus in their life. They find friends to aid them therein who have adab like themselves. Proper manners with the sheikh include:

1. To show him the politeness due to him as a Muslim and a scholar. Ibn 'Abbas (Allah be well pleased with him) said, "A scholar among his people is like a prophet among his nation."

2. To listen to what he says about anything permissible and carry it out to the best of one's ability, even if of the contrary opinion. If there is a problem with it, or one later arises, one may re-explain one's circumstances in order to help him decide, though when he has understood, one follows his decision. A disciple should consult him about major, life-altering decisions such as marriage, travel abroad, changing jobs, and so forth. Most decisions of life are covered in the sheikh's instruction from Suhbas and teaching sessions. Personal advice directly from the sheikh takes precedence over the general instruction contained in written works, recordings, and group teaching, though as previously noted a sincere disciple will often open one of the sheikh's works or put on a recording without planning and find the answer he needs in front of him. When seeking advice, there is no harm in briefly reacquainting the sheikh with one's situation and the last measures agreed upon, for disciples consulting are not few.

3. To visit the sheikh when able. The yearly Suhbas are the intensive courses of our tariqa and should not be missed. Whoever travels to visit the sheikh at the zawiya or at Suhbas in other countries finds baraka in every step. One should not visit other sheikhs of the path without the sheikh's permission. One should not even ask, unless there is some pressing interest that cannot be otherwise met. One should not take Sufism from any living teacher except one's own sheikh: that is why he has been created. If it happens that destiny joins between oneself and another sheikh in some place, the same politeness is due to him that is due to one's own sheikh, though one does not take his advice on matters of the path. If the sheikh of a tariqa is teaching another subject such as hadith, *tafsir* (Koranic exegesis), fiqh, or similar,

one may study it with him, as long as he does not go into Sufism. When public lectures are given by visiting sheikhs, if one needs an Islamic social event, one may go, though the *madad* or spiritual help in them is not usually very great. We do not attend the dhikrs of other tariqas, though anyone may attend ours.

4. To have loyalty to one's sheikh, respect him, and honor him when present and when absent. It is ill-bred for disciples to discuss other living sheikhs of the path. Sheikh al-Hashimi disliked disciples even mentioning him to followers of other sheikhs. The proper conduct is to mention them seldom, if at all; with politeness, and without going into details. When someone mentions ill of one's sheikh in one's presence, one should rebut them, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Whoever defends the good name of his brother, Allah will fend the hellfire from his face on Judgement Day" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.55: 2044. H). If they persist in slander, one should get up and leave. If slander about one's sheikh is written, it should be unread and ignored, because it is haram. Slander of one's sheikh poisons one's whole *suluk*.

5. To pray for one's sheikh. I once asked Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman what I should pray for him for, he said, "For well-being ('afiya) and Iman." One should pray for all the sheikhs in one's *silsila* that Allah increase His love for them and raise their spiritual degrees.

6. To watch and wait for the benefit Allah creates in the presence of the sheikh as a cat waits at a mouse-hole. One does not yawn, slouch, fidget, look at one's watch, or the like, because of the unconcern it shows and lack of adab.

7. If the sheikh is in a place, one attends all his gatherings. It is not fitting to intentionally miss a single gathering that one can attend.

8. Not to leave any session at which the sheikh is teaching. Allah may bestow a point of knowledge upon a disciple in it that his whole life will thrive from.

9. To believe that one's sheikh is the most complete of the people of the path of his time and most accomplished of those who exist, so that the validity of one's intention towards the sheikh be

as perfect as possible, and one may follow his example in everything without hesitation. If one's intention is otherwise, little benefit will reach one.

10. To realize that the relationship between the sheikh and murid is purely voluntary: one may leave the tariqa or it may leave one at any time. Some disciples are given a second chance, few a third.

The Muqaddam

The case of a sheikh's *muqaddam* or deputy, literally "one placed ahead," and to a lesser extent, of the Latifiyya host, is different in some respects from that of a sheikh. He perhaps most resembles an elder brother who has been put in charge of his brothers and sisters to carry out something at their father's behest. In past centuries, in rural Morocco and Algeria, for example, where villages were isolated from one another and communication was difficult, the role of a *muqaddam* needed much wider discretionary powers, and obedience to him was wholly imperative.

In our times, the main tasks of *muqaddam*s are to serve the brethren, organize gatherings of disciples, distribute the sheikh's instructional materials to them, and to lead dhikrs and teach in the sheikh's absence. They are also authorized to give the path to newcomers into the tariqa, the distinguishing feature of a *muqaddam*. In his lifetime, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman invested both Sheikh Ashraf and his wife Hedaya with this function, showing that a woman also may have it, as opposed to that of sheikh, who may only be male. Like other teachers of Islamic knowledge, *muqaddam*s must be shown respect. They have authority in group matters in the absence of the sheikh. In non-group matters of the path, such as one's personal *suluk*, they give counsel and serve, and one should listen to them as one listens to the sheikh, though their precept or example is not absolutely binding. Rather, obeying them is adab with one's *sheikh*, who has placed them in that position. The obligations of tariqa members towards the *muqaddam* are thus twofold:

1. The first is to respect his authority in leading all group

activities, and in distributing and clarifying the sheikh's instructional materials such as the *muraqaba* lessons of *jihad al-nafs* or subduing the self, and in reading Sufi texts at gatherings, and as a counselor.

As for the latter, the *muqaddam* is there because often the sheikh is unable to talk to everyone who has a question, seeks advice, or needs to be calmed down or get back to work on his *nafs*. The *muqaddam* does all these things, and the disciple should benefit as much as he can. If he cannot, then he should return to the sheikh—but without ill will, as long as there has been no contravention of the Sacred Law. It may be that Allah has not created one's *rizq* or 'spiritual provision' with this particular *muqaddam*, or that temperaments are too far apart to strike up a warm relationship. In any case, the sign of a true disciple is total adab, silence, and submission to Allah's will, unless speaking is obligatory to amend something amiss, here by speaking first directly with the *muqaddam*, or if that does not improve matters, then with the sheikh. One should not discuss such things with other murids because it is slander.

2. The second obligation towards a *muqaddam* is to honor him as a tariqa member and a believer. We are obliged to show love and respect to everyone in the tariqa in exaltation of the sacred quest each disciple has taken upon himself of drawing nearer to Allah Most High in the spiritual path—above and beyond the love and adab due to all Muslims for the fact that Allah has honored them with *La ilaha illa Llah, Muhammadun rasulu Llah* ("There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah"), which necessitates for them endless bliss in the next world. Allah would not give something infinitely valuable to someone worthless; and we have nothing to object to in His choice, for He has created them as well as us.

3. A third obligation, not yet mentioned for its rarity, consists of *tawkil*, or the *muqaddam* being made a *wakil* or 'designated agent' for the spiritual training of a particular disciple. This is something rare, a special function the sheikh explicitly invests a *muqaddam* with, and concerns few disciples.

Adab Towards Brethren

A man is strong through his group. Ibn Mas'ud (Allah be well pleased with him) said, "See well that you all obey and belong to the group, for these two are the rope of Allah that He has commanded; and verily what you dislike in a group is better than what you like alone" (*Sharh al-sunna* [11], 10.54). The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "The believer is the mirror of the believer, and the believer is the brother of the believer; he helps him keep hold on his livelihood, and defends him from behind" (*Abu Dawud* [94], 4.280: 4918. H).

Abu Madyan told his disciples, "Sobriety and self-respect consist in conformity with the brethren, save in that which Sacred Knowledge warns against." To have good adab and a heart without grudges or grievances towards any of one's brethren in the tariqa is the true measure of one's *tarbiya* or spiritual education. Few succeed in the tariqa who are at odds with the people in it, for they lack the requisite intuition of its baraka. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "A believer is gracious company: there is no good in someone who is neither good company nor liked as company" (*Ahmad* [52], 2.400: 9198. H). And Ibn 'Ajiba notes, "Whomever the brethren are fed up with, the sheikh cannot win back acceptance for; though someone whom the sheikh is fed up with, the brethren may win him back acceptance." Problems in adab are problems in character. Among the adab of a murid with his brethren are:

1. Chivalry, self-sacrifice, and politeness towards all; to give everything and ask nothing in return; to return only good for evil; not to cause worry or anxiety to them in any way, shape, or form.

2. Not to criticize any of the brethren, but rather to mention only their praiseworthy points and refrain from saying anything else.

3. To see oneself as the lowest of the brethren and not see anyone as below one, for no one but Allah knows what life's final outcome will be.

4. Not to seek to lead or be placed ahead of one's brethren before one is placed ahead of them, but rather to withdraw behind; and even if one has the ability for leadership, not to seek it.

5. Not to befriend anyone at open enmity with one's brethren, because they are as a single individual, and whatever hurts some of them hurts all.

6. Not to miss the gatherings of the brethren, for dhikr, learning, and so on, without a pressing excuse. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Adhere to the group, and beware of being off alone, for the Devil is with the single person, while he is farther away from two. Whoever desires the wide expanse of paradise, let him hold fast to the group" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.238–39: 2304. 8). There is tremendous baraka, *tarbiya*, and benefit in this hadith.

High-Profile Murids and Spiritual Ranks

If the matter of *tarbiya* in the path is primarily between sheikh and disciple, these two designations are mainly *roles* rather than ranks. The ranks in the Shadhili tariqa are shared equally by everyone in it; namely, the rank of Iman, the greatest rank on the face of the earth; and the rank of *nisba* or 'affiliation with *Ahl Allah* (Those of Allah)' by having taken the tariqa, in reality an elite rank within Iman. The belief by some that certain tariqa members are closer to Allah than others may be mere imagination, or when true, may change, if only for a time, before they die, as Allah has said:

> until, when the earth has taken its full adornment and is decked out surpassing fair, and its folk believe it entirely at their command, Our judgement reaches it, by night or by day, and We make it mown down stubble as though it had flourished not but yesterday. Even thus do We propound the verses for a people who consider (Koran 10:24).

"Fame breaks backs," as Sufis say. Men, no matter how advanced, may be ruined by prominence. We don't know what will happen. So the proper adab in the tariqa is not to seek reputation but shun it, especially among fellow murids, and rather to regard everyone else besides oneself with esteem and respect. Abu Bakr al-Tamastani said, "The best of men is he who sees good in others." It may be inferred from this that there is no "in crowd" of murids within the tariqa with whom one must spend most of

one's time, or whose collective opinion constitutes a decisive case about anything. "In-ness" is often one of the antics of the lower self. A companion in the path is humble, reserved, sincere, unassuming, generous, and busy with the remembrance of Allah from the remembrance of other people. The one who knows most about tariqa personalities and politics is generally the farthest from the point. When this is coupled with envy for distinction, as in an "inner ring" of those old enough to know better, *ikhlas* or sincerity has fled. Muhammad al-Buzaydi says:

> He who occupies himself with Allah is saved, while someone of this group who is oblivious to Him and occupied with his ego ends up slandering *Ahl Allah* [Those of Allah]—and he who maligns them has lost everything. No one reaches illumination but he who regards his brethren with the eye of respect and esteem, and all the righteous, and all Muslims. Otherwise, he will not even catch the scent of the secret (*al-Adab al-mardiyya* [18], 181–83).

The real "in crowd" consists of those who are in the Divine Presence with slavehood and worship, not in this or that clique. One doesn't have to make it with anybody to be a Sufi. One has to make it with Allah.

Solidarity in the Path

The real nature of solidarity in the tariqa lies in the fact that Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) have commanded us to be together, we cannot do without each other for our spiritual progress, which does not occur in solitude, and we love and respect all in the tariqa because their goal is their Lord. In this, everyone in the tariqa is as one single person in concern for one another, help, and prayers. At the same time, the group more nearly resembles a private sanitarium where ailing people are regaining health, than, say, an elite university. This is why Ahmad Zarruq and others mention *ta'azzuz bi al-tariq* or 'pride in the spiritual path' as among the diseases of the self.

To understand what this means, and does not mean, we must distinguish between ascribing blessings to Allah and ascribing

them to ourselves. If one is thankful for the tariqa as a manifestation of Allah's favor upon one in being allowed to tread the high and rare path to Him, it is praiseworthy. But if one is exulting to oneself over one's wisdom and superiority in joining the tariqa, one has entered the wing of the hospital for the deluded.

If feelings of superiority are the inward, egotistical manifestation of pride in the path, cultish behavior is its outward, social counterpart. Both are a fundamental misunderstanding of the path, which inwardly leads to the absolute Reality (haqiqa) beyond all forms, semblances, and ranks; leaving those who reach it with nothing to be proud of—as Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman termed it, "Bankruptcy from everything but Allah"—while its outward expression is *khidma* or service to others.

The tariqa is far from a cult, and few things put off others more than people obsessed with their collective identity. There is something supercilious about such people even when they are trying to be polite, and those who meet them are put off. It is far from the simple, friendly manner of Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman and the other pure-hearted Sufis I met and knew, for example, among the elder brethren of Sheikh al-Hashimi in Damascus. At all gatherings of the tariqa, from the yearly Suhba on down, when newcomers are visiting, one should not hang back out of shyness with one's usual circle of friends, but come over and greet them and talk with them, welcoming them sincerely as one would like to be welcomed oneself. Visitors may well be better than we are: "Verily, the noblest of you with Allah is the most godfearing" (Koran 49:13). And Ibn 'Umar said, "Godfearingness (taqwa) means not seeing yourself as better than anyone."

Friendship with Allah

The *tariqa ilahiyya*, the divine path itself, is to be *with* Allah without any relation. The way of the Sufis is presence with the Divine through dhikr, as Abu Bakr al-Tamastani advised, "Sit with Allah much, and sit with people little." Whoever sits with another gradually becomes affected by his attributes, and so too the *dhakir* through long presence with Allah becomes dyed with the color of Infinity. This is *safa* or purity: untroubledness of soul in the

Sea of the Divine Immensity. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said,

> Allah Most High says, "I shall be towards My faithful servant as he deems I shall; and I am with him whenever he makes remembrance (dhikr) of Me. If he remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself, and if he remembers Me in an assembly, I remember him in an assembly better than they; and if he draws nearer to Me by a span, I draw nearer to him by a cubit; and if he draws nearer to Me by a cubit, I draw nearer to him by a fathom; and if he comes to Me walking, I come to him running" (*Bukhari* [17], 9.147–48: 7405. S).

The unutterable bliss of such *with*-ness is why dhikr and worship, rather than declaiming and discourse, are normally the sign of those close to Allah, unless directed by their sheikh to speak. If not, then in Ibn 'Ata Illah's words, "whoever you see answering everything he is asked, expressing everything he sees, and mentioning everything he knows, you may thereby infer is ignorant" (*al-Hikam* [49], 31: 70). The mark of the *dhakir* is reticence about himself. Much horizontal movement—comings, goings, visits, trips, and socializing—generally indicates not much vertical movement. As Abu Yazid said, "Whoever knows Allah is undesirous of aught that occupies from Him." The dhikr reiterated with the tongue imbues first the mind, then the heart, then the entire being of the *dhakir*; in his every action and circumstance. Sheikh Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi said of such *khulla* or 'intimate friendship' with Allah:

> The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), lifting our spiritual aspirations to exalted ranks, said, "Were I to take anyone as an intimate friend, I would have taken Abu Bakr as an intimate friend (khalil); however your companion is the intimate friend of Allah" [*Muslim* [74], 4.1855: 2383. S]. Allah says, "And Allah took Abraham as a beloved friend" [Koran 4:125]. And the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) addressed his Lord, "You are the Companion on journeys" [*Muslim* [74], 2.978: 1342. S]. So when you realize

it is not impossible for Allah to have loving companionship with His servants, do your utmost to *be* such a beloved friend by looking to what will lead to gaining that noble friendship. You will not find any means besides complete harmony (muwafaqa) with Him. And we have no knowledge of our harmony with the Abidingly Real (al-Haqq) except our harmony with His Sacred Law. So whatever He prohibits we prohibit, whatever He makes lawful we hold lawful, whatever He permits we permit, whatever He dislikes we dislike, whatever He recommends we recommend, and whatever He obliges we hold obligatory. So when this completely absorbs your whole self and is your attribute, and you truly carry it out as it should be carried out, you shall have attained intimate companionship with the Divine—or rather even love, which is even greater and more exclusive than intimate companionship (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* [48], 3.271).

Abul Hasan al-Shadhili summed it up by saying, "Take Allah as a friend, and the Devil as a foe, and you will have complete relief." All other companionship in the tariqa is a means to this end.

The Devil

An involuntary companion of the salik is the Devil. Allah has given everyone a devil, and it leads some to destruction, as He says,

> And We had given them over before to ominous unseen companions inseparably present with them; So they decked out fair to them what was before them and what awaited them beyond; And they incurred the just sentence of their misdeeds, along with peoples who passed away but shortly before them, of jinn and men: Verily they were complete in ruin (Koran 41:25).

The adab of the murid with the Enemy is:

1. To know that the Devil is thousands of years old, that he has seen many human beings, and he knows how they think. It

is proper manners not to be surprised at anything that comes to one's mind of his whisperings. Abu Hurayra relates in a rigorously authenticated (sahih) hadith:

> People came, of the Companions of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), and asked him: "We find in ourselves that which any of us would consider an enormity to even utter." He said, "You have actually found it?" and they said, "Yes". He said, "That is plainly true faith" (*Muslim* [74], 1.119: 132. S);

meaning, Imam Nawawi notes, "Considering it an enormity to even utter is plainly true faith" (*Sharh Muslim* [75], 2.154), indicating that as long as one has fear and disgust for passing thoughts of unbelief (kufr) and the like and does not make them convictions, they do no harm. To distinguish, the thoughts of the *nafs* are typically about desires and pleasures (shahawat), while those from the Devil are often surprisingly bizarre and evil.

2. To know that the Devil's line of work is sowing doubts in minds about Allah, about oneself, about the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), about the tariqa, about one's sheikh, and about anything else that is valuable in the next world. Whoever sets out for Allah is going to hear some of these doubts, because he has chosen to fight the Devil, whose whole aim is to make him as bad as he was before taking the path, or worse.

In order to see who is paying for an advertisement, one has to look at the bottom line. Similarly, to see who is behind one's doubts, one follows the thought out to its logical conclusion and sees what it leads to. If the conclusion is "Things are so bad, there is nothing to be grateful to Allah for," or "You've gone this far, you might as well go all the way," or "You can't do everything, so you might as well do nothing"—one can guess who's paying for it.

3. When one has doubts that one cannot get rid of, to ask the sheikh.

4. When there is laziness and procrastination, to ask oneself what one wants from the path, and prioritize one's spiritual works. One should discard half one's works, if necessary to do a

good job on the other half. A favorite trick of the Devil is to pile up works higher and higher until everything collapses.

5. When plagued by the Devil with *waswasa* or 'obsessive doubts' about one's ablution, one's prayer (salat), one's reciting of the Fatiha, and the like, to relax and do approximately what one should, take things as they come, and leave the rest to Allah. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said:

> Verily the religion is ease, and none shall make the religion hard except that it will defeat him. So do the right, try merely to do as best you can, be of good cheer, and seek help in the mornings, the afternoons, and something of the night (*Bukhari* [17],1.16: 39. 8).

6. To remember that true enmity for the Enemy is to be in love with the Beloved. Our way is to eat well, to sleep well, to dress well, to work well, and study well—but with the heart directed to Allah rather than other people. This is the way of Abul Hasan al-Shadhili (Allah be well pleased with him), and the sum of the adab of the path.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE SHADHILI RULE

THE fruits of the path depend on adhering to its rule, the *usul al-tariqa*, literally "roots of the way." A tree with deep roots can rise high into the sky, and "ever yields its fruit at the behest of its Lord" (Koran 14:25), while if badly rooted, a tree can be blown over by the first storm, or eventually wither and die. The following comprise the *usul* that Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman taught by life and precept as most fundamental to the Shadhili path, and were followed by everyone I knew who succeeded in it. They are not listed in order of importance, for whoever takes even some of them has taken a mighty share, while whoever dismisses any may find it a fatal flaw. And success is only through Allah. They are:

1. To praise Allah for everything.

2. Utter slavehood ('ubudiyya) to Allah alone, and to worship Him because He is the Lord, for nothing besides. Allah says, "And worship your Lord until there comes to you what is certain" (Koran 15:99), meaning death. Slavehood means to make demands on oneself for Allah, not demands on Allah for oneself; to abide by the limits of Allah; to seek only Allah's good pleasure; to never tire of fulfilling Allah's rights; to trust in Allah; and consign all things to Allah.

3. To make one's relationship with Allah one's path, and make the path one's relationship with Allah, so there is nothing of comparable importance in one's life. This means to have a valid aim in taking the path, meaning Allah alone and nothing besides; to

travel if necessary to find a sheikh; and to have high aspiration (himma) that disregards every obstacle. It means carrying out one's resolves, undeterred by the Devil, this world, one's ego, or willful folly; having the certitude of hope that Allah will complete one's tawfiq in the tariqa; and spending one's time, money, and self in the path.

4. To hold fast to the Book of Allah: in one's conduct, life, aims, hopes, loves, family, and everything else.

5. To live according to the sunna of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace): in word, by the daily prayers and dhikrs he used; in deed, by works sincerely for Allah; in heart, by his gracious character towards others; and in inmost being (sirr) by worshipping Allah as though one sees Him.

6. To have one sheikh.

7. To have one tariqa.

8. To have one prophet and one religion. Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) with the final and perfect religion of Islam that surpassed and abrogated all other spiritual traditions. Murids who mix other religions, metaphysical theories, spiritual techniques, inner-development courses, and the like with their *din* are like a child with a paintbox who mixes all the colors to make a rainbow. He only produces a dirty brown, which is what such murids inwardly become, while Sufism is purity itself.

9. To know enough fiqh to make valid one's practice, and enough Arabic to grasp the spirit of the revelation.

10. To take care of the obligatory first.

11. To eat only the halal.

12. To fulfill all rights. It includes respect for others, good manners, and noble character.

13. To give one's all to dhikr and worship; to organize one's time around good works, for men to pray at the mosque, for all to pray *tahajjud*, and to eliminate from one's life whatever deadens the heart to dhikr and worship.

14. To seize the moment (waqt) one is in to worship Allah in the most appropriate way. It means not postponing works, for every moment has something in it due to Allah, and nothing can

ever really be "made up," because the second time is not the first. It means taking advantage of the yearly sunnas of the Islamic calendar; and that when one reads any hadith, one applies it, if only to do so once before life ends.

15. To make the dhikr of Allah only for Allah, not some ulterior motive. Someone who makes dhikr for spiritual states is worshipping them, not Allah. The heart of a *dhakir* is filled with Allah.

16. To always strive to surpass one's *ma'rifa*, in compliance with the word of Allah "So know well that there is no god but Allah" (Koran 47:19).

17. To worship Allah out of gratitude. It means to thank Allah for all one's blessings, to count Allah as one's greatest blessing, to be content with what Allah gives one, and to turn to Allah in both good times and bad.

18. To recite a portion of the Koran daily, learning enough *tajwid* or 'proper rules of recital' to do so as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) did.

19. Godfearingness (taqwa) secretly and openly. It includes following the madhhab one has chosen with as few exceptions as possible, preferring the way of *'azima* or strictness to the way of *rukhsa* or dispensation when faced with legal alternatives, concealing one's nonobligatory works from others, and fear of private sins.

20. To have perpetual repentance (tawba).

21. To completely finish with a sin and everything that reminds one of it. *Salat al-tawba* is a sovereign remedy from the sunna.

22. To hate the sins of the disobedient and detest kufr.

23. To dislike disclosure of others' faults, unless necessary to warn others of harm; and to speak well of the dead.

24. Neediness and poverty before Allah.

25. To give more than one takes. It means to give much charity, not to impose on others, to be a mercy to those around one, to prefer others to oneself, to earn one's own livelihood so one does not have to beg, and to serve others without regard as to who they may be. It means to give sincere selfless service,

whether convenient or inconvenient, to Allah, the sunna, and the tariqa.

26. To keep the company of others for Allah. It means to prefer the company of those of the afterlife. It includes distancing oneself from the worldly and their values, to shun the mentality of the common and irreligious, and eschew the company of oppressors.

27. To pray *istikhara*.

28. To remain on ritual purity (wudu), especially when making dhikr, eating, sleeping, and learning.

29. To faithfully do the wirds one has been given, seeing them as better than doing other things.

30. To supplicate Allah with one's whole heart in the *Wadhifa* and the *hizb*s and prayers of Abul Hasan al-Shadhili and other awliya so as to realize their *tarbiya*, adab, and baraka in one's life.

31. To keep the company of the sheikh and brethren for *tarbiya*, not merely baraka.

32. To be a true disciple, meaning convinced of the secret between one's sheikh and Allah, and willing to submit, and listen, and follow. It means to obey and revere one's sheikh; to guard the heart from changing towards him; to bear patiently with harshness from him; not to visit him except to seek guidance or to serve; to love his disciples and all who love him; and not to have friends who dislike him.

33. To have due respect (hurma) for the sheikh. It means not to offend his person, name, privacy, or his family and household, be they agreeable or not, righteous or otherwise. It means to avoid being too informal with the sheikh, to shut the door of slander against him, not to test him, and to be loyal to the end.

34. To see the sheikh as the manifestation of Allah's own concern ('inaya) for one, not merely as another human being. It means to return to the sheikh personally when there are problems in one's dhikr or path, not merely to books or recordings; to consult with him about sins difficult to get rid of, not trying to put on a good face by concealing faults he may help one with, including *waswasa* about the sheikh or tariqa; it means to ask about life-transforming decisions before making them; and when asking,

not to try to pry the answer out of the sheikh that one already has in mind and wants to hear.

35. To attend tariqa dhikrs, and sincerely regret missing any; to observe their adab, and not see one's place at them as higher than anyone else's.

36. Not to take pride in the tariqa, try to impress others with it, or be deluded by how long one has been with the sheikh.

37. Not to dwell on the past years of one's path, other than to thank Allah, or to repent and change.

38. To oppose the *nafs*, not identify with it. This means to accept criticism from others; never to ascribe any spiritual state or rank to oneself; to use the *suhba* of one's sheikh and the texts of the Sufis to break the habits of the self; to give it what it desires only within the limits of the Sacred Law; to control it when it wants to vent its emotions on others; to have a *muraqaba* lesson that one is currently working on; to negate all low thoughts while they are still small; to feel lowly and heartbroken at being as bad as one is, not exultant or pleased with one's actions, states, or knowledge. Whoever is pleased with himself has no knowledge at all of the path, no matter what he may know. The cure for this is *tawhid*, awareness of the divine unity in the creation of our acts; first as knowledge, then as certainty, finally as vision and permanent station.

39. Not to exaggerate in mortifying the *nafs*, lest it kick back unexpectedly from the severity, and overturn one's *suluk*. Rather, one should proceed with it diplomatically, by degrees, and build up with incremental stages that start small and proceed to the desired perfection.

40. To work on oneself. It means to acquire praiseworthy states such as patience, silence, reliance on Allah, and lack of idle curiosity; to transcend the three great barriers of the *nafs:* love of this world, doing spiritual works for the sake of reward, and impatience with tribulation; and to strive to follow one's sheikh in his dhikr, scrupulousness, taqwa, faithfulness, and other works of the heart.

41. Indifference to whether anyone accepts one or rejects one besides believers who judge by the *nur* (light) of Allah. Otherwise,

one should never listen to stories circulated about one or attempt to answer them.

42. To disdain no one, nor think less of those who do little extra worship. It means to give all people the benefit of the doubt (husn al-dhann), meaning at minimum to remain silent about them, for it is of the *nafs* to suspect people when appearances are merely equivocal.

43. To do no harm. It means not to wrong anyone; to pray against no one who has wronged one, but rather ask Allah's tawfiq for them in this world and the next, so He may save them from continuing their wrongs. It means putting up with annoyance from others; and not holding any grudges.

44. Not to complain to anyone except Allah, unless obligatory to eliminate some wrong. If we raise a matter to someone to take responsibility for it, we raise it to Allah first.

45. To exalt Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace), Allah's religion, Allah's friends (awliya), and everything Allah has exalted.

46. To venerate the awliya of the tariqa, and all previous Muslims who preceded us in the path to Allah. It means to recount their words, traits, and deeds with respect; and to defer to them on questions of Sufism and Ihsan, taking the *Hikam* [Mystic Maxims] of Ibn 'Ata Illah with its commentaries as the tariqa's main *suluk* text, and the men and women mentioned in Qushayri's *Risala* and other major early works as the measure of what it means to be a Sufi. It includes benefiting from the *qasida*s of the sheikhs by understanding them and aspiring to live up to their meanings.

47. To see the good in people other than oneself, and praise one's brethren to others.

48. To perpetually return to Allah, through everything, in everything, from everything.

These *usul* are the basis of tawfiq in this path, and whoever exalts them will find they exalt him. Simply put, the tariqa is a means to raise the veil between the slave and Allah. Its condition is the above rule, which comprises the validity of one's Islamic faith and practice; the traditional Sufi method of knowledge

('ilm), practice ('amal), and resultant spiritual state (hal); and the three great aims of *suluk*: repentance (tawba), nonattachment to other than Allah (zuhd), and *tahqiq al-'ubudiyya* or realizing one's slavehood. Allah has created the path, the sheikh, and the salik to allow this to happen. It does not always happen, because Allah has given individuals different abilities, and more importantly their own free choice, and in His wisdom has willed that the path remain, as Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman told me, somewhat *'aziz* or rare. But whoever gives it its due, or even a measure thereof, will find the tariqa at many a critical juncture in life standing guard before him like a powerful bulwark, turning aside disasters. Sheikh Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Fasi (d. 1062/ 1652) said, "Whoever keeps our company, even if he does not inherit anything of the legacy of the ultimate spiritual reality (haqiqa), does succeed in putting his religion right, and in that delusion leaves him." The tariqa's illuminatory knowledge, benefits, and baraka come from its spiritual authority, which lies in an unbroken series of teachers from the Prophet himself (Allah bless him and give him peace).

The Spiritual Lineage of the Order

In Sufism, as in any serious Islamic discipline such as jurisprudence (fiqh), Koranic recital (tajwid), and hadith, a disciple must have a master, or sheikh, from whom to take the knowledge, one who has himself taken it from a master, and so on, in a contiguous chain of masters back to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) who is the source of all Islamic knowledge. In Sufi tradition, this means not only that the present sheikh has met and taken the way from a master, but that the master during his lifetime has explicitly and verifiably invested the disciple—whether in writing or in front of a number of witnesses—to teach the spiritual path as a fully authorized master (murshid ma'dhun) to succeeding generations of disciples.

Such transmission from an unbroken line (silsila) of masters is one criterion that distinguishes a true or "connected" Sufi path (tariqa muttasila) from an inauthentic or "dissevered" path, (tariqa munqati'a). The leader of a dissevered path may claim to

be a sheikh on the basis of an authorization (ijaza) given by a master in private or other unverifiable circumstance, or by a figure already passed from this world such as one of the righteous or the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), or in a dream, or so on. These, as Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to say, "warm the heart" (yusta'nasu biha) but none meets Sufism's condition that a sheikh must have a clear authorization connecting him with the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), one that is verified by others than himself. Many lies are told by people, and without publicly verifiable authorizations, the tariqa might be compromised by them.

Our Shadhili tariqa has come from its Prophetic origin through such a series of formal investitures, from master to master down to Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman, who inherited Sheikh Ahmad al-'Alawi's written authorization to Sheikh Muhammad al-Hashimi, witnessed with many others al-Hashimi's authorization to Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id al-Kurdi, and received Sheikh al-Kurdi's written authorization to himself. Sheikh al-'Alawi says, by way of introducing his own *sanad* or 'initiatic chain' in a work printed by one of his disciples some thirteen years before his death:

> Since the school of the Folk (may Allah's grace be upon them) is the most meticulous of all schools in realization, and highest of ascending paths in exactitude, it is obligatory for every person who belongs to them to make sure of his initiatic chain in the path in the fullest way. For higher spiritual Realities (haqa'iq) cannot be taken from just anyone who makes claims, but only after establishing in the most thorough manner possible his lineal chain of authorization—as you shall see, Allah willing, from this contiguous initiatic chain of transmission, the last having taken it from the first in unbroken succession back to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace)—without the slightest doubt or suggestion of a doubt in a single pearl of its strand. For whoever holds fast to the offshoot has taken hold of the parent stock, whenever lineal connection is established.

Because some of our sheikhs' path was not completed without having met two or more sheikhs, we have noted whom they took as a second sheikh in numbered footnotes, as best we knew, and so [have also detailed in subfootnotes the chains of those in the main footnotes who joined between two or more preceding spiritual lines] back to the beginning. We have separated each level with lines drawn between them to perfect the benefit and strive for the best way possible. We should realize that most tariqas overlap and depend upon each other's lines.

Whoever seeks brevity may confine himself to the chain at the top of the page, because it is easier to memorize and preserve, and is the main reliance of our tariqa, as has reached us, and as we have taken it from the peak of its glory and fullest fruit of its cultivation, him of pleasing character and wondrous secrets, our liegelord and master Muhammad ibn al-Habib al-Buzidi, the noble Prophetic descendant from Mostaganem—may Allah beautify his resting place and make the exalted Presence his dwelling and refuge—for it is from him that we have taken, and he taught us, and he authorized us, may Allah reward him as he truly deserves. And he took it from his teacher Abul Mawahib, our master Muhammad ibn Qaddur al-Wakili, who took it from our master Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Qadir al-Basha and from Abu Ya'za al-Mahaji, both of whom took it from Mawlay al-'Arabi ibn Ahmad al-Darqawi . . . (*Irshad al-raghibin* [82], 40).

This passage has been quoted at length for two reasons. The first is Sheikh al-'Alawi's uncompromising insistence in the first paragraph on the importance of the connectedness of the initiatic chain through authorized sheikhs. Our sheikh related that when Sheikh al-'Alawi authorized Sheikh al-Hashimi in Damascus, he had the authorization stamped and certified by various government notaries in order that there should be no mistake as to its authenticity.

The second reason is that in the last century a biography of Sheikh al-'Alawi apparently confused the issue of al-Buzidi's

disciples consulting with one another after his death as to who should succeed him as their sheikh, with the issue of there being anyone authorized as a sheikh by him at all, be it Sheikh al-'Alawi or anyone else. The biography overlooked al-Buzidi's other authorizations to Algerian disciples that were public knowledge. Another whom al-Buzidi authorized besides Sheikh al-'Alawi, for example, was Sheikh Muhammad ibn Yallas of Tlemcen (*Tarikh 'ulama' Dimashq* [1], 1.428). His authorization and that of Sheikh al-'Alawi were known to, among others, Sheikh al-Hashimi, who as a child had met Sheikh al-Buzidi, and who moved to Damascus in 1911 with Ibn Yallas, his own murshid in the tariqa.

These men had too much respect for tradition, and too much knowledge of the path, to imagine that anyone could be a sheikh without authorization from a master. And if al-Buzidi did not name a particular sheikh as his *successor* for the brethren in the West, the suggestion that Sheikh al-'Alawi was "elected" as a murshid of the tariqa by popular consensus of disciples not only contradicts the spirit and the letter of his own words above ("he authorized us"), but the system of ijazas in Islam from beginning to end. It is highly implausible. Sheikh al-Hashimi has said:

> Whoever dares to be a sheikh without an authorization is afflicted, deluded, and duped, and it is to be feared that he will finish life outside of Islam (yukhsha 'alayhi su' al-khatima), as has been conveyed in *Ibtihaj al-qulub*. This is because of the insolence to Allah it entails, and pretending to mediate between Allah and His servants, and to be a successor of His messengers in guidance and instruction (*Shitranj al-'arifin* [42], 48).

If all this is familiar enough to initiates, it is somewhat foreign to the modern mentality, and some authors, Islamic and Orientalist, have claimed that certain links of the Sufi chain of initiation, particularly early ones, are not contiguous, to which the hadith expert Sheikh Ahmad al-Ghumari has replied in considerable detail in his *'Ali ibn Abi Talib Imam al-'arifin* ['Ali ibn Abi Talib: Imam of Those of Gnosis], establishing that the Shadhili-

Darqawi line is fully authenticated, from al-'Arabi al-Darqawi back to its Prophetic origins, sheikh by sheikh.

The order's spiritual line is thus from Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri, from Muhammad Sa'id al-Kurdi, from Muhammad al-Hashimi, from Ahmad al-'Alawi, from Muhammad al-Buzidi, from Muhammad Qaddur al-Wakili, from Abu Ya'za al-Mahaji and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Qadir, from al-'Arabi al-Darqawi, from 'Ali al-Jamal, from al-'Arabi ibn 'Abdullah, from Ahmad ibn 'Abdullah, from Qasim al-Khassasi, from Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah, from 'Abd al-Rahman al-Fasi, from Yusuf al-Fasi, from 'Abd al-Rahman al-Majdhub, from 'Ali al-Sanhaji al-Dawwar, from Ibrahim al-Fahham, from Ahmad Zarruq, from Ahmad al-Hadrami, from Yahya al-Qadiri, from 'Ali ibn Wafa, from Muhammad Wafa Bahr al-Safa, from Dawud al-Bakhili, from Ahmad ibn 'Ata Illah al-Iskandari, from Abul 'Abbas al-Mursi, from Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, from 'Abd al-Salam ibn Mashish, from 'Abd al-Rahman al-'Attar al-Zayyat, from al-Ghawth Abu Madyan, [from this point only one of the several chains has been quoted:] from 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, from Sa'id al-Mubarak, from Abul Hasan ibn 'Ali Yusuf, from Abul Faraj al-Tartusi, from Abul Fadl 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Tamimi, from Abu Bakr al-Shibli, from Abul Qasim al-Junayd, from Sari al-Saqati, from Ma'ruf al-Karkhi, from Dawud al-Ta'i, from Habib al-'Ajami, from Hasan al-Basri, from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, from Muhammad the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace).

The Covenant of the Tariqa

To take the tariqa means to pledge oneself and one's life to Allah. Ourselves and lives already belong to Allah, but the *bay'a* or 'pledge' taken by the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) from both men and women of the Sahaba on various occasions was for such things as from the men accompanying him on a military excursion to fight with him against the idolaters of Mecca, be steadfast, not flee, and to have fortitude in battle (Koran 48:18); and from the women who came to him after Hudaybiya not to commit idolatry, steal, fornicate, or slay unwanted

children (Koran 60:12). These two examples show, by comprising matters *already* religiously obligatory for those who swore to them, that there was some other, special benefit and baraka in the sunna of *bay'a*. This is confirmed by the many hadiths of *bay'a*s taken from individuals of the Sahaba by the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) for such things as to say the Testification of Faith (Shahada), give sincere help and advice to every Muslim, obey in everything good, and not to die except firmly upon Islam. Like these *bay'a*s too, the tariqa *bay'a* is not to be confused with that of political allegiance to the true caliph, should he appear. Our *bay'a* is outwardly submitting oneself to the good pleasure of Allah by taking a tested path of *ikhlas*. Inwardly, it is a heart connection to the sheikh and all members of the tariqa, a *ruh* connection to the baraka of the awliya in the *silsila* back to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), and a *sirr* or 'inmost being' connection to the *tariqa ilahiyya* or way of Allah Himself.

The covenant by which the sheikh initiates a murid into our order may be translated: "In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate. All praise be to Allah, Lord of all Worlds of Beings, Most Merciful and Compassionate, Lord of the Day of Reckoning. You alone we worship, and in You alone we seek help. Guide us the straight way. The way of those You have blessed, not those on whom is wrath, nor those who are lost" [Koran 1:1–7].

"Verily those who swear fealty to your command but swear fealty to Allah: The hand of Allah is upon their hands. So whoever breaks his word but breaks it against himself; And whoever fulfills what he has solemnly sworn Allah to do, He certainly bestows a full mighty wage" [Koran 48:10].

The wird of this Hashimi-Darqawi Shadhili tariqa, whose lineal succession is connected to the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace), is that you make remembrance of Allah morning and evening, beginning with "I seek refuge in Allah from the execrable Devil" one time and "In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate" three times, then:

"Whatever you send ahead for yourselves of good you shall find with Allah is better and greater in reward; And ask Allah's

forgiveness, verily Allah is all-forgiving and compassionate" [Koran 73:20].

Then you say, "I ask Allah's forgiveness, I ask Allah's forgiveness, I ask Allah's forgiveness," one hundred times. On the hundredth, you say, "I ask forgiveness of Allah Most Great, whom there is no god besides, the Living, the Ever-Subsisting Through Whom All Subsists, and I repent to Him." Then you say:

"Truly Allah and His very angels ever bless the Prophet with favor and mercy: O you who believe, invoke blessings upon him, and pray utterly that he be given all peace and security" [Koran 33:56]. Then you say: "O Allah, bless our liegelord Muhammad, Your servant and messenger, the Unlettered Prophet, and his folk and Companions, and grant them peace," one hundred times. On the hundredth, you say, "and grant him peace as tremendous as the greatness of Your Being, at every moment and time." Then:

"So know well that there is no god but Allah" [Koran 47:19]. [Then:] "There is no god but Allah alone, without partner. His is the dominion, His the praise, and He has power over everything" [Or if you wish, you may confine yourself to "There is no god but Allah"], one hundred times, and on the hundredth, "There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah: Allah bless him and his folk and Companions and give them peace." Then you read Sura al-Ikhlas [Koran 112] three times, and close with the Fatiha. Then you pray for yourself, your parents, your sheikhs, your brethren of the Sufis, and all Muslims.

All of us are solemnly obliged to perform the prescribed prayer, honor our parents, and give sincere help and advice to every Muslim. We have become brethren in Allah: whoever of us is saved must take his brother by the hand. We take solemn covenant from you that you perform this wird to the best of your ability, likewise the *hizbs* of Abul Hasan al-Shadhili and the rule of his order, and to recite the Koran during the night or day in the amount that you are able, even if only a little. Success is through Allah Most High; and praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

The Wird of the Tariqa

The disciple says, morning and evening:

A'ūdhu bi Llāhi mina sh-Shayṭāni r-Rajīm ["I seek refuge in Allah from the execrable Devil"] one time.

Bismi Llāhi r-Raḥmāni r-Raḥīm ["In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate"] three times.

Then one recites the word of Allah Most High *Wa mā tuqaddimū li anfusikum min khayrin tajidūhū 'inda Llāhi huwa khayran wa a'ḍhama ajra(n), wa staghfiru Llāh(a), inna Llāha ghafūru r-raḥīm* ["Whatever good you send ahead for yourselves you shall find is better and greater in reward with Allah; And ask Allah's forgiveness. Verily Allah is oft-forgiving and compassionate"] once; then one says, *Astaghfiru Llāh* ["I ask Allah's forgiveness"] ninety-nine times, and on the hundredth time, *Astaghfiru Llāha l-'Aḍhīma lladhī lā ilāha illa huwa l-Ḥayyu l-Qayyūmu wa atūbu ilayh* ["I ask the forgiveness of Allah Most Great, whom there is no god besides, the Living, the Ever Self-Subsisting Through Whom All Subsists, and I repent unto Him"].

Then one recites the word of Allah Most High *Inna Llāha wa malā'ikatahū yuṣallūna 'ala n-Nabiyy(i); Yā ayyuha lladhīna āmanū ṣallū 'alayhī wa sallimū taslīmā* ["Truly Allah and His very angels ever bless the Prophet with favor and mercy; O you who believe: invoke blessings upon him, and pray utterly that he be given all peace and security"] once.

Then one says, *Allāhumma ṣalli 'alā Sayyidinā Muḥammadin 'abdika wa rasūlika n-Nabiyyi l-Ummiyy(i), wa 'alā ālihī wa Ṣaḥbihī wa sallim* ["O Allah, bless our liegelord Muhammad, Your servant and messenger, the Unlettered Prophet, and his folk and Companions, and grant them peace"] ninety-nine times, and on the hundredth, *Allāhumma ṣalli 'alā Sayyidinā Muḥammadin 'abdika wa rasūlika n-Nabiyyi l-Ummiyy(i), wa 'alā ālihī wa Ṣaḥbihī wa sallim taslīman bi qadri 'aḍhamati dhātika fi kulli waqtin wa ḥīn* ["O Allah, bless our liegelord Muhammad, Your servant and messenger, the Unlettered Prophet, and his folk and Companions, and grant them peace as tremendous as the greatness of Your Being, at every moment and time"].

Then one recites the word of Allah Most High *Fa'lam annahū lā ilaha illa Llāh* ["So know well that there is no god but Allah"] once, and then, *Lā ilāha illa Llahu waḥdahū lā sharīka lah(u), lahu l-mulku wa lahu l-ḥamdu wa huwa 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* ["There is no god but Allah alone, without partner, His is the dominion, His the praise, and He has power over everything"] one hundred times (though if necessary, one may confine oneself simply to *Lā ilāha illa Llāh* ["There is no god but Allah"] a hundred times), and after the hundredth: *Lā ilāha illa Llāhu, Sayyidunā Muḥammadu r-rasulu Llāh(i), ṣalla Llāhu 'alayhi wa 'alā ālihī wa Ṣaḥbihī wa sallam* ["There is no god but Allah, our liegelord Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless him and his folk and Companions and give them peace"].

Then one recites Sura al-Ikhlas (Koran 112) three times and the Fatiha once, then prays for oneself, one's parents, one's sheikhs, one's brethren of the Sufis, and all Muslims.

The Arabic Text

الورد العام للطريقة الهاشمية الدرقاوية الشاذلية

يقولُ المُريدُ صَباحاً ومَساءً:

أعوذُ بالله مِن الشّيطانِ الرّجيم (١)

بسمِ اللهِ الرّحمنِ الرّحيم (٣)

﴿وَ مَا تُقَدِّمُوا لأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللهِ هُوَ خَيْراً وَ أَعْظَمَ أَجْراً وَ اسْتَغْفِروا اللهَ إِنَّ اللهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ﴾

أَسْتَغفِرُ اللهَ (٩٩)

أَسْتَغفِرُ اللهَ العَظِيمَ الذي لا إلهَ إلا هُو الحَيُّ القَيُّومُ وأَتُوبُ إلَيْه (١)

﴿إِنَّ اللهَ وَ مَلائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَ سَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيماً﴾ (١)

اللهُمَّ صَلِّ على سَيِّدِنا مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدِكَ ورَسُولِكَ النَّبِيِّ الأُمِّيِّ وعلى آلِهِ وصَحْبِهِ وسَلِّم (٩٩)

اللهُمَّ صَلِّ على سَيِّدِنا مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدِكَ ورَسُولِكَ النَّبِيِّ الأُمِّيِّ وعلى آلِهِ وصَحْبِهِ وسَلِّمْ تَسْلِيماً بِقَدْرِ عَظَمَةِ ذاتِك في كُلِّ وَقْتٍ وحِين (١)

﴿فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لاَ إِلَهَ إِلاَّ اللهُ﴾ (١)

لا إلهَ إلا اللهُ وَحْدَهُ لا شَرِيْكَ لَهُ، لَهُ المُلكُ ولَهُ الحَمْدُ وهُوَ على كُلِّ شيءٍ قَدِيرٌ (١٠٠)

وإذا اضطُرَّ لضيقِ وقتٍ أو طروء مانعٍ فلا بَأسَ بالاقْتِصار على (لا إلهَ إلا الله) (١٠٠)

وبعدَ تمامِ المئةِ يقول: لا إلهَ إلا اللهُ سيِّدُنا محمَّدٌ رسُولُ الله، صلّى اللهُ عليه وعلى آلِهِ وصَحْبِهِ وسَلَّم (١)

سورة الإخلاص (٣)

الفاتحة (١)

ثمَّ يدعو لنفسِه وأبوَيه وأشياخِه والفقراءِ الصوفية وجميع المُسلمين.

PART THREE

Bearings

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FAITHS AND MYSTICISMS

MANY religious people today wonder whether the truth is one, or whether it can be equally expressed by a number of religious traditions whose doctrines contravene one another. Allah affirms in the Koran and sunna that the Truth is one, and that nothing contradicts it but falsehood. He sent the Prophet Muhammad, "the Messenger of Allah to you and the final seal upon all prophets" (Koran 33:40), to convey the revelation of Islam, which abrogated and superseded all previous revelation. The logical fallacy of multiple truths has been set forth in chapter 8 above, but because of puzzlement remaining in some minds, the following three chapters have been added to treat particular questions people have asked me about religious truth and the universality of faith.

The first question was: Is it possible that God does not merely save followers of other previously valid religions besides Islam out of a divine amnesty, but for the truth that exists in previous religions, such as Native American religions and others?

The answer is that every true religion has been revealed by God through His messengers the prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace), so all revealed religions were originally the truth. But how much of this original truth remains is irrelevant once they have been superseded by a subsequent revelation, since the very fact of their abrogation shows they are no longer acceptable to God or adequate for men. The position of scholars of the

Ash'ari school, like Imam Ghazali and others, entails that followers of such faiths, if unreached by the new prophet or his message, will be saved by a general amnesty from Allah regardless of the amount of truth or falsity in them, as He has said, "Nor would We ever punish until We had sent a messenger" (Koran 17:15).

All salvation, for Muslims or others, is out of divine favor and amnesty, not because of works, even the work of having true faith, for faith is counted in Islam among one's works, it being rigorously authenticated that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Shall I not tell you of the best of your works?—Faith in God" (*Bukhari* [17], 3.188–89: 2518. S). And he also said (Allah bless him and give him peace): "None of your works shall enter any of you into paradise." Someone said, "Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?" and he said, "Not even me, unless Allah overspreads me with a mercy from Him; but do what is right" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2169: 2816. S). Imam Nawawi writes:

> The plain purport of such hadiths affirms the position of Muslim orthodoxy that no one deserves reward or paradise for his acts of obedience. As for the word of Allah Most High "Enter paradise for what you were doing" [Koran 16:32], and His saying, "That is paradise, bequeathed to you for that you used to do" [Koran 7:43], and similar verses which show that paradise is entered through works, they do not contradict these hadiths, but rather the meaning of such verses is that entering paradise is by means of spiritual works; though the God-given success to do the works, the guidance to have sincerity in them, and their being accepted from one are all by the mercy and favor of Allah Most High. So while it is true that one does not enter paradise through mere works, it is also true that one enters it through works: that is to say, by reason of works, which are of the divine mercy (*Sharh Muslim* [75], 17.160–61).

So not even by the truth of one's religious convictions does anyone enter paradise, but rather only through Allah's *favor* in accepting one's faith in them, in which sense all who enter paradise are under the "divine amnesty" of Allah's mercy.

The Nature of Religious Truth

In religion, "truth" is something that engages not only the mind or the body or the soul separately, but all of these together. Allah sent messengers to mankind, prophets such as Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (upon them be blessings and peace), first, to reaffirm the Divine Oneness (tawhid) that is the very soul of every true revelation; second, to give substance to decent people's impulse to do good and avoid evil through positive rules defining these two things in relation to God and to man; and third, to purify people's hearts by the grace (baraka) of following the messenger of the time. All three are truth. For the mind, truth consists in knowing of the Oneness of God and the other eternal verities of faith; for the body, truth is doing what is right and shunning what is wrong; and for the soul, truth is the closeness to God that results from sincere application of the first two.

Because of divine providence for both the essential sameness and incidental differences of mankind, the first of these three aspects of truth, the Oneness of God, has never differed in the original revelations at all; the second of them, the commands and prohibitions of each faith, if more variable than the other two, reveals a shared moral content among revealed religions that plainly outweighs their differences; and the third of them, purity of heart, has differed very little in kind from faith to faith. Because of the nature of God and man, of the absolute and limitary, of life and death, there is a natural "family resemblance" between all faiths—just as the earth's languages, in their variety and succession, articulate an essential human nature similar enough to permit translations between most of their texts and utterances. The unity of faiths proceeds from the unity of God and the unity of man; their differences represent either divine providence for different peoples and times, or the altering of the message of God by the hands of men.

The Number of the Saved

In the historical succession of divine revelations, people in every land and time who accepted God's message—the truth in its three

aspects that constitute religion—were saved, while those who rejected His message were lost, and those who were unable to do either because of being unreached by His message were also saved, for Allah does not punish until He sends a messenger. In Islam, nobody goes to hell on a technicality, a point perhaps not always as well appreciated by other world faiths. I remember learning in catechism the position of the Roman Catholic Church, Christianity's largest and oldest representative, in the form of a question and answer:

> Q: Are all obliged to belong to the Catholic Church to be saved?
> A: All are obliged to belong to the Catholic Church in order to be saved (*Catechism of Christian Doctrine* [20], 32).

For those unfamiliar with the terminology, the opposite of "saved" is "damned." Compare this to the passage from Imam Ghazali in which he says:

> Indeed, I hold that most Christians of the present time, whether Europeans (al-Rum) or Central Asians (al-Turk), are included in the divine mercy, Allah Most High willing, meaning those in the far lands of Europe and Asia who have not been reached by the Prophetic message. For they fall into three categories:
>
> 1. One group who have never even heard the name of Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) to begin with, so are excused.
>
> 2. A second group who have heard of his name, his character, and the inimitable miraculous signs of truth (mu'jizat) that appeared at his hands; namely, those peoples adjoining the domains of Islam, and who mix with them, these being the unbelievers who deny the revelation.
>
> 3. And a third group between the two others, who have heard of the name of Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace), but not of his character and attributes. Rather, since childhood they have heard that "a lying imposter named Muhammad claimed to be a prophet"—just as our children have heard that a liar called al-Muqaffa' was raised

> up by Allah as a pretender to prophethood. Such people in my view fall into the same category as the first group above in respect to knowing the true attributes of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), for even though they have heard his name, they have not heard of how he really was, so how should they respond? (*Faysal al-tafriqa* [32], 3.96).

Amnesty is amnesty, and for Ghazali's position—which because of the reasoning behind it plainly applies to other, non-Christian faiths, and even atheists—the measure of divine truth that remains in a previous faith now superseded has little bearing on the ultimate salvation of its followers. In other words, "nor would We ever punish until We had sent a messenger" (Koran 17:15) means that whoever is without the means to believe shall attain unto the mercy of Allah no matter what they believe.

Works and Paradise

But if one's entering paradise is through the pure mercy of Allah, one's rank in paradise is nevertheless commensurate with one's spiritual state and works, as is attested to by many Prophetic hadiths and Koranic verses, such as "Each shall have degrees of rank for what they worked" (Koran 6:132), and "Whoever does the slightest bit of good shall see it; And whoever does the slightest bit of evil shall see it" (Koran 99:7–8).

Although I have not seen the question dealt with by Islamic scholars, it is difficult to think of a reason why such verses in their generality should not apply to everyone who enters paradise, even non-Muslims who do so out of divine pardon for their ignorance.

But this does not entail that someone given amnesty for his ignorance of the true revelation of his time, no matter how virtuous he may be, can attain to the felicity of someone who believes in that revelation, even if the latter be remiss, for Allah says: "Shall We deal with Muslims [lit. "those who submit"] as We do with criminals? How is it that you judge?" (Koran 68:35–36).

There are many hadiths of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) that clarify that believing in the message of Islam entails a mighty wage from Allah that is beyond description or

comparison with any other work, or even *all* other works together. Tirmidhi, Ahmad, and others relate with a well-authenticated (hasan) chain of transmission from 'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

> Allah Mighty and Majestic shall bring forth a man of my Community in front of everyone on Judgement Day, and shall unroll ninety-nine great scrolls [recording his sins] against him, each extending as far as the eye can see. He shall then say to him: "Do you deny a single bit of this? Have My scribes wronged you?" and he shall say, "No, my Lord." He shall then say, "Do you have any excuse, or even one good deed?" and the man shall be dumbstruck, then say, "No, my Lord." To which He will reply, "On the contrary, you *have* done one good deed in Our eyes, and this day you shall not be wronged." Then a single scrap of parchment shall be presented in his favor on which shall be written, "I testify there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is His slave and messenger." [Allah] shall say, "Bring him forth," and the man shall say, "My Lord, what is this scrap of parchment compared to all these immense volumes?" To which He shall answer, "Truly, you shall not be wronged." Then the huge scrolls shall be placed on one side of the balance-scale, and be altogether outweighed by the single scrap, and nothing shall prove weightier than "In the Name of Allah, Most Merciful and Compassionate" (*Ahmad* [52], 2.213: 6994. H).

This momentous divine judgement shows the vast disparity between the Testification of Faith *La ilaha illa Llah, Muhammadun rasulu Llah* ("There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah") and any other possible work, something attested to by many other hadiths, among them the rigorously authenticated words of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace)

> Whoever testifies that there is no god but Allah alone without associate, and that Muhammad is His slave and messenger, and that Jesus is His slave and messenger and His word

which He cast unto Mary, and a spirit from Him, and that paradise is true, and hell is true—Allah shall enter him into paradise no matter what he has done (*Bukhari* [17], 4.201: 3435. S).

To understand the full import of this, one should note that in Islam, the highest rank of good deeds is reserved for that which Allah has made personally obligatory (wajib), including the category of refraining from every sin. Indeed, refraining from sin is even more imperative and of higher rank than personally obligatory *works*, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) made clear by saying, "So when I forbid you something, utterly shun it; and when I command you to do something, do what you are able of it" (*Bukhari* [17], 9.117: 72.88. S). In each of the two hadiths preceding above, the Testification of Faith outweighs even a *lifetime* of neglecting this obligation to refrain from sin, the instances of which in the first hadith fill ninety-nine great scrolls, "each extending as far as the eye can see."

This means that the Testification of Faith is weightier than an entire lifetime of the highest rank of good deeds, the obligatory, without such a Testification. Thus by the highest possible works that anyone without the Testification of Faith could fill his life with, the most saintly of all such people could not reach the rank reached by someone with the Testification of Faith, the believer, "no matter what he [the believer] has done [amiss]." So someone who knows and believes in Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) cannot be compared to someone who does not, no matter how great their works, a truth which Allah expresses with the words "Say: Are those who know equal with those who do not know?" (Koran 39:9). Clearly, as the thirteenth-century mystic Ibn 'Ata Illah said, "Those pardoned for committing a crime are not like the elect who are the concern of the Divine" (*al-Hikam al-sughra* [49], 99: 40).

The Meaning of Belief in God

Both Christians and Muslims hold that a human being must believe in One God to attain salvation in the next world. God, for Muslims, is one in being without partner, unique without peer,

ultimate without opposite, alone without equal. He is the Master of All Existence, the Creator of time, space, matter, and energy, of the physical and spiritual worlds, and all else. All that is exists through Him, while He needs absolutely nothing through which to exist, and has no need of any of His creation, for were He to *need* something, He would be lacking, not perfect, and something imperfect could never be God.

In this respect, He is quite different from anything in the universe that He has created, whether earth, sky, land, or sea, because it all exists only through His creative act, and if this were to stop for a moment, they would simply disappear.

To "believe in God" means to believe in His existence, His oneness, that He has all attributes of perfection, and is exalted above any imperfection. Now, if we were to discover a group of people somewhere and asked them about their religion, and they said, "We believe in the One God, Lord of Everything," we would agree with this. But suppose after being asked for more details, they said, "We are very fortunate in that God lives right here. In fact, He is that mountain over there. That mountain is God Incarnate." Now these people are sincere, and they believe in One God, whom they worship. Yet this is not in itself sufficient, because they have mixed their belief in the One God with something that is not God; namely, thousands of tons of rock making up the mountain, which relies for its existence upon such things as the atmospheric pressure upon it, the gravity that holds it to the earth, the structural strength of its component parts—in all of which the mountain is a physical entity bound by time, space, matter, and energy; bound by a thousand constraints. A single asteroid from space, disrupting these, would leave nothing of the mountain except a memory.

It is plain, upon reflection, that all created things are like the mountain in this respect: radically dependent upon the circumstances around them. Because of their essential need, they cannot in any sense *be* God, who is the Lord of Existence, the Creator of time and space and all the rest, who rules these things and is not ruled by them.

Someone who affirms the One God, but identifies Him with

some particular thing in the universe, such as a mountain, a tree, or a human being, has *associated* something with God that is not of Him. Muslims believe that God's divine message to all the prophets—from Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses, to Jesus and Muhammad—was to declare the pure Divine Oneness, and free mankind from associating anything else in worship with God. The prophets (upon whom be peace) were sent by God to teach people that it is His right to be worshipped as He is: One, without admixture of anything else with Him. Indeed, He created mankind that they might know and worship Him in this way.

Each messenger came to tell us that God alone has the right to be worshipped, that all we were worshipping besides Him must now be left aside, because it is other than Him, and only a physical manifestation of His almighty power, whether it be a mountain, a star, or even Jesus Christ.

In my own Christian upbringing I had been taught:

> Q. What is the chief teaching of the Catholic Church about Jesus Christ?
> A. The chief teaching of the Catholic Church about Jesus Christ is that He is God made man (*Catechism of Christian Doctrine* [20], 15).

But when I later went to a Catholic university, I could not help reflecting that man was limitary and finite, while God was not, and I asked myself why I believed that Jesus was God.

If one could point in answer to the scriptures, I found that modern textual studies of the New Testament had raised large question marks as to that book's authenticity. In a course in theology, I read a work by Joachim Jeremias, one of the foremost exegetes of the New Testament in the twentieth century, who after a lifetime of study of the original finally agreed with the German theologian Rudolph Bultmann that "without a doubt it is true to say that the dream of ever writing a biography of Jesus is over" (*The Problem of the Historical Jesus* [62], 12), meaning that even the chronology of the life of Jesus could not be established from the New Testament with confidence. So how then, I wondered, with the question of whether or not he was God?

Indeed, although ordinary Christians seem quite unaware of the revolution that has taken place in New Testament scholarship by Christians themselves over the past few decades, if we look at the literature, we find such paragraphs as the following, from a textbook by James D. G. Dunn for university students in their third year of New Testament studies. The italics are his.

> Similarly the thought of Jesus' *deity* seems to be *a relatively late arrival* on the first-century stage. Paul does not yet understand the risen Christ as the *object* of worship: he is the theme of worship, the one for whom praise is given, the one whose risen presence in and through the Spirit constitutes the worshipping community, the one *through* whom the pray-er prays to God (Romans 1.8; 7.25; II Corinthians 1.20; Colossians 3.17) but not the object of worship or prayer. So too his reticence about calling Jesus 'God'. Even the title 'Lord' becomes a way of distinguishing Jesus from God rather than identifying him with God (Romans 15.6; I Corinthians 8.6; 15.24–28; II Corinthians 1.3; 11.31; Ephesians 1.3, 17; Philippians 2.11; Colossians 1.3). Paul was and remained a monotheist. That reticence in calling Jesus 'God' is only really overcome towards the end of the first century with the Pastorals (Titus 2.13) and again with the Fourth Gospel (John 1.1, 18; 20.28) (*Unity and Diversity* [27], 226).

If the "thought of Jesus' deity"—which I had been taught was the *chief teaching* of Christianity about Jesus—was "a relatively late arrival on the first-century stage," meaning not taught by Jesus himself, then we might legitimately wonder where it came from. The answer seems to lie in the "Imperial cult" proclaimed throughout the Roman Empire shortly before the era of Jesus, a cult which enjoined the worship of Rome and the emperor. In the words of Hugh Schonfield, a translator of the New Testament,

> the cult had developed in the reign of Augustus [Caesar], who for reasons of State policy accepted deification, and authorized the building of temples in which he was wor-

shipped. He was formally decreed Son of God (*Divi Filius*) by the Senate. . . .

Gaius Caligula (A.D. 37–41) [also] became obsessed with the notion of his deity, and his sycophantic officials played up to him. . . .

A later emperor, Domitian (A.D. 81–96), insisted that his governors commence their letters to him, "Our Lord and our God commands." It became the rule, says [the Roman historian] Suetonius, "that no one should style him otherwise in writing or speaking."

Among Gentile believers in Jesus as the true emperor it was not possible to hold him to be inferior in dignity to Caesar. So we find in the Gospels the term Son of God (the Imperial *Divi Filius*) conjoined with the Jewish royal title of Messiah. The late Gospel of John, composed not long after the reign of Domitian, even borrows the words of address which that emperor demanded, and makes Thomas address Jesus as "My Lord and my God" [John 20.28] (*Passover Plot* [87], 199–200).

If the idea of Jesus being God was not part of original Christianity, but only an accretion added to it later, this was still (for me) secondary to the fact that Jesus' deification contradicts the nature of God. God is absolutely free of need for anything He has created, while the historical Jesus, as a human with a body, needed time and space, and was bound by a thousand other necessities. I left Christianity because I clearly saw that the two natures, divine and human, are mutually exclusive, like that of a square and a circle. To ask whether God can "become a human being" is like asking if God can "produce a natural number greater than eight but less than three"—that is, they refer to nothing meaningful, such that we could ask if it could exist, but rather are a simple misuse of words.

Mystics of Abrogated Faiths

Despite accretions that vitiated the primal faith of Christ, and before him other prophets, and the ultimate abrogation of their religions by Islam, I do not doubt that mystics of other faiths

might reach a higher spiritual plane, for when the lower soul (nafs) is negated and sublimated by spiritual disciplines, the powers of the higher soul seldom fail to appear, and it is not impossible that in such a condition it might behold Ultimate Reality, which is, after all, as real and objective as any city or landmark in the physical world.

But what a difference between the few hundred Jewish, Christian, or even American Indian mystics of the Western tradition who left any record of their experiences—men and women such as Catherine of Siena, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Francis of Assisi, Moses Cordovero, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, John Tauler, Henry Suso, Jakob Böhme, Handsome Lake, Isaac Luria, Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross—and the literally thousands of Sufi masters of the Islamic tradition who founded the great mystical orders, had immense influence for centuries at all levels of society, produced an unparalleled and monumental body of mystic literature in poetry and prose, and left countless adepts in the beatitude of the Divine Presence, a living tradition that continues to this day. What other religion has ever seen a *Mathnawi* like Rumi's? There is a tremendous difference between a few outstanding spiritual personalities that appeared at times and places in the West, like occasional watering places scattered across a desert waste, and the throngs of mystics of the Islamic milieu voyaging on the sea of the Divine.

Not only in the sheer numbers of contemplatives, but in the abidingness of their personal experiences, there is a great difference between the mystics of Islam, who proceeded from the light of true monotheism to a state of perpetual illumination, men such as Sahl al-Tustari, al-Ghawth Abu Madyan, Shams al-Tabrizi, Ibn al-'Arabi, Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, and others whose testimony is unambiguous, and those of other faiths, who through self-mortification caught momentary glimpses of the Godhead in "experiences" they then translated to others in spiritual depositions.

Finally, there is a vast difference between someone who experiences the One and knows it as such at all levels of his being—body, mind, and soul—and someone who discerns the One through a miasma of priestly dogma. Allah says, "And He is not

pleased with unbelief—for His servants' sake" (Koran 39:7). Where Ibn al-Farid saw "clearness without water, lightness without breeze, illumination without fire, and soul without body" (*Diwan* [51], 88), Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, saw "the most Holy Trinity, as it were, in the likeness of a triple plectrum or of three spinet keys" (*Mysticism* [104], 272). The former was freed from the shadows of his own finitude by the sun of pure Being, while the latter's mystic insight remained indelibly colored by received priestcraft. The distinction between form and content avails nothing here, and what should rather be said is that even an object of numinous knowledge can be refracted through the prism of a sufficiently insidious interpretation. "The color of the water," as Junayd once said of those who know Allah, "is the color of its vessel." Clearly, to experience the supernatural does not necessarily mean to win the good pleasure of God.

If the objective reality of the Divine is accepted, the veracity of the revelation that one follows is a necessary condition for knowledge of this Reality. East is not farther from West than someone who returns from encountering Allah, lost forever to anyone or anything besides, is from someone who returns from a state of unitive vision to worship another human being. The two are not alike. For most mystics do in a sense return, if profoundly changed, to whence they began. The Sufis of Islam proceeded from the unconditional monotheism they originally believed in the beginning to the One they encountered at every level of their being at the end. Mystics of other faiths had to begin with a heroic struggle to rise above the historical accretions of their faiths—the worship of Jesus by Christianity, the anthropomorphism of Judaism, the pantheon of Hindu gods, the nature-worship of shamanism, the negation of all divine attributes by Taoism, or of the divine Being itself by Buddhism—to which each was to return, at least in principle and personal narrative, after their experiences.

Truth and Salvation

To answer the question of whether "God does not merely save followers of other previously valid religions besides Islam out of

a divine amnesty, but for the truth that exists in previous religions," Ghazali's position, that of Ash'ari Islamic orthodoxy, entails separate consequences for each kind of "truth" distinguished above.

For the first type of truth, that of orthodox belief, we have seen that Ghazali's position entails that those unreached by the true message are saved no matter what they believe, so the amount of truth that remains in their religion is inconsequential before the divine amnesty. This is also clear from passages in Ghazali's *Maqsad al-asna* [The noblest aim] and other works which show he knows that Christians have confounded the nature of God and man, and ended up worshipping a man, Jesus, instead of God, and that this is *shirk* or 'associating others with God,' the most complete corruption of faith possible; yet he still says in the passage previously cited: "I hold that most Christians of the present time, whether Europeans (al-Rum) or Central Asians (al-Turk) are included in the divine mercy, Allah Most High willing, meaning those in the far lands of Europe and Asia who have not been reached by the Prophetic message" (*Faysal al-tafriqa* [32], 3.96), the latter including those "who since childhood have [only] heard that a lying imposter named Muhammad claimed to be a prophet" (ibid.), for Allah only taxes each soul according to its capacity.

As for the salvational role of the second type of truth, the practice of good works, for those unreached by Islam, though I have not found anything explicit by Ghazali or others about it, one may infer from the above-quoted Koranic verses that Allah's *justice* for all those who do good entails a distinction above and beyond His divine *amnesty* for their ignorance of evil. That is, they shall benefit from what they know and follow of morality.

This would also seem to apply to the third type of truth, the "truth of being" of personal sanctity and purity of heart produced by following the message and example of one's prophet, typified by the experiences of the mystics, and described by the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) as "to worship Allah as though you see Him." Here too, though the excellences of Western mystics are not lost on us, they are not really comparable to

the mysticism of traditional Islam, whether in sheer numbers of illuminates, in the proven and systematic training of the great orders that ensured and passed on their experience to future generations, in the abidingness and clarity of their experience of the Divine Beatitude, or in the way their minds construed this experience when they endeavored upon their return to make what they could of it comprehensible to others. The divine question "Are those who know equal with those who do not know?" (Koran 39:9) is even more telling in mysticism than in the previous two types of truth.

IN summary, religious truth consists in faith, works, and sanctity for the very good reason that man is mind, body, and heart. As such, the "truth that exists in previous religions, including those such as Native American religions and others" may indeed play a role in their salvation: not "truth" in the sense of their religious faith, which when altered or misunderstood is irrelevant to the supreme amnesty mentioned in the Koran, but rather in the *degree* of their felicity once their salvation is granted through this amnesty. While according to the above-mentioned hadiths such people can never reach the degree of the *least* of believers in the true prophet of the time, their degrees in paradise on the general basis of the Koranic verses about good and evil we have cited may well be influenced by their own moral choices in this world to do good and avoid evil as understood from their own revelations, indeed as common to most religions and even most consciences, and followed by them in the measure of their sincerity. And Allah knows best.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

UNIVERSALISM

NOTHER question I have been asked concerns the "universal validity of all religions" imputed to Ibn al-'Arabi and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri by a number of contemporary Sufi books in English. This has become a tenet of faith among present-day academics who write about the subject, and few works appear on it in print today that do not accept it. My own mentor in Sufism, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri, never found this in Ibn al-'Arabi's words after a lifetime of studying them, but was aware that readers, especially those without deep learning in Arabic, could misconstrue him about it, and he answered with clarity. He believed that Ibn al-'Arabi's work was not a "system of thought" at all, but an experiential school of *being* that one had to realize through Sufi instruction with a teacher before one had any authority to speak about it. He had heard Ibn al-'Arabi's magnum opus *al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* read word-by-word in this way by his own sheikh Muhammad al-Hashimi to a private circle of disciples, and later taught it himself to murids for the better part of two decades. When a prominent "Ibn al-'Arabi author" was once mentioned to him, he said, "The poor soul—caught in mere thought . . ." He was also familiar with the three-volume *al-Mawaqif* of Emir 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri, who died in his native Damascus. What follows is the understanding of religious diversity and universality held by the two as he taught it to us.

The Finality of Islam

For all Muslims, only Islam is valid or acceptable now that Allah has sent it to all men, for the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said, "By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no person of this whole world community shall hear of me, neither Jew nor Christian, then die and not believe in what I have been sent with, save he will be of the dwellers of hell" (*Muslim* [74], 1.134: 153. S). This hadith was also related by Baghawi in his *Sharh al-sunna*, by 'Abd al-Razzaq in his *Musannaf*, and by others. It is a rigorously authenticated (sahih) evidence that clarifies the word of Allah in Sura Al 'Imran "And whoever seeks anything as a religion but complete submission to Allah [lit. "Islam"], shall not have it accepted of him, and in the afterlife shall be of the ruined" (Koran 3:85) and many other verses and hadiths. That Islam is the only remaining valid or acceptable religion is necessarily known as part of our religion, and to believe anything other than this is unbelief (kufr) that places a person outside of Islam, as Imam Nawawi notes: "Someone who does not believe that whoever follows another religion besides Islam is an unbeliever (like Christians), or doubts that such a person is an unbeliever, or considers their sect to be valid, is himself an unbeliever (kafir) even if he manifests Islam and believes in it" (*Rawda al-talibin* [81], 10.70).

This is not only the position of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence represented by Imam Nawawi, but is also the recorded position of all three other Sunni schools, as noted by Ibn 'Abidin of the Hanafi school (*Radd al-muhtar* [43], 3.287), Ahmad al-Dardir of the Maliki school (*al-Sharh al-saghir* [22], 4.435), and Mansur al-Buhuti of the Hanbali school (*Kashshaf al-qina'* [16], 6.170). Each of these Imams is authoritative in his school. The scholars of Sacred Law are unanimous about the abrogation of all other religions by Islam because it is the position of Islam itself. It only remains for the sincere Muslim to submit to, in which connection Ibn al-'Arabi has said: "Beware lest you ever say anything that does not conform to the pure Sacred Law. Know that the highest stage of the perfected ones (rijal) is the Sacred Law of

Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace). And know that anything esoteric that contravenes the exoteric is a fraud" (*al-Hall al-sadid* [40], 32).

Ibn al-'Arabi and Emir 'Abd al-Qadir

The emotive preference of some in our times for the validity of all religions has led them to seek backing for it in the writings of famous Sufis who are far from such beliefs, including Ibn al-'Arabi and 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza'iri. In a work entitled *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, Professor William Chittick writes:

> The Shaykh [Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi] sometimes criticizes specific distortions or misunderstandings in the Koranic vein, but he does not draw the conclusion that many Muslims have drawn—that the coming of Islam abrogated (naskh) previous revealed religions. Rather, he says, Islam is like the sun and other religions like the stars. Just as the stars remain when the sun rises, so also the other religions remain valid when Islam appears. One can add a point that perhaps Ibn al-'Arabi would also accept: What appears as a sun from one point of view may be seen as a star from another point of view. Concerning abrogation, the Shaykh writes,
>
> > All the revealed religions (shara'i') are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the light of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null (batil) by abrogation—that is the opinion of the ignorant ([*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya*,] III 153.12[–16]).

> If the Shaykh's pronouncements on other religions sometimes fail to recognize their validity in his own time, one reason may be that, like most other Muslims living in the western Islamic lands, he had little real contact with the Christians or Jews in his environment, not to speak of followers of religions farther afield. He had probably never met a saintly representative of either of these traditions, and he almost certainly had never read anything about these two religions except what was written in Islamic sources. Hence there is no reason that he should have accepted the validity of these religions except *in principle*. But this is an important qualification. To maintain the particular excellence of the Koran and the superiority of Muhammad over all other prophets is not to deny the universal validity of revelation nor the necessity of revelation's appearing in particularized expressions (*Imaginal Worlds* [19], 125–26).

The professor's claim in the first paragraph above that Ibn al-'Arabi "does not draw the conclusion that many Muslims have drawn—that the coming of Islam abrogated (naskh) previously revealed religions" is false, and could have been corrected by a more faithful and fuller translation of the passage he has quoted from the *Futuhat*, which reads:

> The religious laws (shara'i') are all lights, and the law of Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) among these lights is as the sun's light among the light of the stars: if the sun comes out, the lights of the stars are no longer seen and their lights are absorbed into the light of the sun: the disappearance of their lights resembles what, of the religious laws, has been abrogated (nusikha) by his law (Allah bless him and give him peace) despite their existence, just as the lights of the stars still exist. This is why we are required by our universal law to believe in all prophetic messengers (rusul), and to believe that all their laws are truth and did not turn into falsehood by being abrogated: that is the imagination of the ignorant. So all paths return to look to the Prophet's path (Allah bless him and give him peace): if

the prophetic messengers had been alive in his time, they would have followed him, just as their religious laws have followed his law.

For he was given comprehensiveness of word (jawami' al-kalim), and given [the Koranic verse] "And that Allah might succor you an invincible triumph" [Koran 48:3], "the invincible" [*al-'aziz*, also meaning rare, dear, precious, unattainable] being he who is sought but cannot be reached. When the prophetic messengers sought to reach unto him, he proved impossible for them to attain to—because of his [being favored above them by] being sent to the entire world (bi'thatihi al-'amma), and Allah giving him comprehensiveness of word (jawami' al-kalim), and the highest rank of possessing the Praiseworthy Station (*al-Maqam al-Mahmud* [of supreme intercession]) in the next world, and Allah having made his Nation (Umma) "the finest nation ever brought forth to men" [Koran 3:110]. The Nation of every messenger is commensurate with the station of their prophet, so realize this (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* [48], III 153.12–20).

The passage, when read carefully, is merely an affirmation that Allah's messengers (upon whom be peace) were true, and everything they brought was true, which is believed by every Muslim. It further avers that everything their laws—*shara'i'*, plural of *shari'a*, means nothing else—contained has not only been abrogated, but is thereby implicitly contained in the new revelation, in which sense "their religious laws have followed his law." A familiar example cited by ulema is the law of talion, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," which was obligatory in the religious law of Moses (upon whom be peace), subsequently forbidden by the religious law of Jesus (upon whom be peace) in which according to the extant gospels "turning the other cheek" was obligatory; and finally both were superseded by the law of Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace), which permits victims to take retaliation (qisas) for purely intentional physical injuries, but in which it is religiously superior not to retaliate but forgive. This is the absorption of the stars' lights into that of the sun, of "what, of the religious laws, has been abrogated by his law

(Allah bless him and give him peace) despite their existence, just as the lights of the stars still exist." This is the sense in which Ibn al-'Arabi is interpreting *comprehensiveness of word* (jawami' al-kalim) here.

What the passage does not say is that non-Islamic religions are valid now that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has been sent with Islam. Professor Chittick's omission of the second half of the passage, which is plainly punctuated at the end by the words "so know this," is puzzling, for it is highly material to the topic, and in spirit and in letter ("because of his being sent to the entire world (bi'thatihi al-'amma)") plainly contradicts the professor's suggestion that Ibn al-'Arabi does not believe "that the coming of Islam abrogated (naskh) previously revealed religions." The wrongness of this notion is clear to anyone who reads the second half of the passage and knows what the expression *bi'thatihi al-'amma* means from having read it in other works of the traditional Islamic sciences that formed Ibn al-'Arabi's primary formal education. It has no other meaning.

In fact, one looks in vain in the works of Ibn al-'Arabi for the belief of the validity of currently existing non-Islamic religions, for this is kufr, as Imam Nawawi and the other Imams mentioned above unanimously concur. Traditional Islam certainly does not accept the suggestion that, to use the professor's words again, "it is true that many Muslims believe that the universality of guidance pertains only to pre-Koranic times, but others disagree; there is no "orthodox" interpretation here that Muslims must accept" (*Imaginal Worlds* [19], 124).

Orthodoxy exists, it is unanimously agreed upon by the scholars of Muslims, and we have conveyed in Nawawi's words above that to believe anything else is unbelief. As for "others disagree," it is true, but is something that has waited for fourteen centuries of Islamic scholarship down to the twentieth century to be first promulgated in Cairo in the 1930s by the French convert to Islam René Guénon, by his onetime disciple Frithjof Schuon, and then by writers following these two. Who else in Islam said it before? And if no one did, and the ulema consider it kufr, on what basis should it be accepted?

My point is that it would have been one thing to say it under their own auspices, but for authors to project such views onto great Muslims of the past is an injustice to them and a mistake that should be corrected. Another example is found in *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, in which Charles le Gai Eaton (omissions are his) says:

> According to the great *mujāhid* (the 'warrior in the path of Allah'), the Emir Abdu'l-Qadir, 'our God and the God of all the communities opposed to ours are in truth One God . . . despite the variety of His manifestations . . . He has manifested Himself to Muhammad's people beyond every form while manifesting Himself *in* every form . . . To Christians He has manifested Himself in the form of Christ . . . and to the worshippers of whatever form it may be . . . in the very form of this thing; for no worshipper of a finite object worships it for its own sake. What he worships is the epiphany in the form of the attributes of the true God . . . Yet that which all the worshippers worship is one and the same. Their error consists only in the act of determining it in a limitative manner [Quoted from Mawqif 236 of the *Mawaqif of Abdu'l-Qadir* in the French translation by M. Chodkiewicz, published by Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1982)]. Abdu'l-Qadir fought the Christians who invaded his land, Algeria, because he was a Muslim. Exiled in Damascus, he protected the Christians against massacre by taking them into his own home because he understood. Those who would challenge him or accuse him of heresy should be prepared to face his sword and accept death from its blade since small men risk their necks when they challenge great ones (*Islam and the Destiny of Man* [28], 53).

The passage quoted from the *Mawaqif* is interesting, not only because scissors seem to have been harder at work on it than sword, but because the reference suggests it has been translated from Arabic to French to English, something of a journey from the original words of the author. I don't know who arranged the

French original, but the above passage has not been quoted from Mawqif 236 of the Arabic *Mawaqif* that I have, which was printed in 1329/1911 in Damascus from the copy of Sheikh 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Bitar, a manuscript read by 'Abd al-Qadir himself, with emendations in his own handwriting in the margins.

The idea, however, is familiar, and is mentioned in a number of places in the *Mawaqif*, and is also mentioned in the chapter of Hajj toward the end of the first volume of the *Futuhat* of Ibn al-'Arabi, whom 'Abd al-Qadir follows closely. Ibn al-'Arabi feels that while God consigns idolaters to hell eternally (if a prophetic warner has been sent to them, for otherwise they are not responsible to do or refrain from anything), their worship is not completely amiss, in that everyone, whether Christian, Jew, fire-worshipper, or idolater, considers what they worship to be the *Divine* (Ar. *al-Ilah*, "the Deity"), and do not worship what they worship except for this reason, in which sense "your Lord has ruled that you shall worship none except Him" (Koran 17:23), in which *ruled*, according to 'Abd al-Qadir, means "brought about"; namely, that Allah, in virtue of this motive and this name (al-Ilah) and His jealousy for its prerogative, often answers the supplications of such worshippers and fulfills their needs; though as said before, their worship is not valid, for "truly Allah forgives not that partners should be ascribed to Him, but forgives whatever is less than that to whomever He wills; And whoever ascribes partners to Allah has fabricated a great iniquity" (Koran 4:48). From one side they do worship the Deity, but from another they have associated with Him the specific objects that they believe He inheres in, so their worship is invalid, because it does not conform to the absolute *tawhid* conveyed by the prophets (upon whom be peace), who taught that Allah is absolute in manifestation, not bound by any created form.

No matter what the religion, then, for Emir 'Abd al-Qadir, Allah cannot *not* be "worshipped" in the limitary sense of the basic impetus of the worshipper towards the Divine. But this does not mean it is acceptable or valid in Allah's eyes. Whoever confuses these two things, as the above passage does, has done violence to 'Abd al-Qadir, who says:

Since the manifestings of Him Intended by Worship are manifold, so are sects and creeds. For the aim of worship is to exalt with reverence, and the lowliness and humility of every worshipper is only rendered to someone able to harm or benefit, give or withhold, to give sustenance, to lower or raise—and these attributes are not in fact those of anyone except One alone, who is Allah Most High, and He is absolutely beyond perception (ghayb mutlaq).

So every worshipper of a form, be it sun, star, fire, light, darkness, nature, idol, phantasm, jinn, or other, maintains that the form he worships is of Him Intended by Worship, and he ascribes the attributes of the Deity (al-Ilah) to it, of harm, benefit, and so on. Such a person would be right, in a way, if only he had not made Him finite and conditional. For no worshipper intends by adoring the form he worships anything except the Reality Deserving Worship, which is Allah Most High, and this is what Allah "has ruled" [Koran 17:23] and brought about.

But they have proved ignorant of this Reality's absolute manifestation, unsullied by conditionality or limitariness, and have proved ignorant of the Reality in point of fact, though they do know it in general terms, this being innately possessed knowledge (*al-Mawaqif* [61], 1.33: 8).

What is the consequence of their proving "ignorant of the Reality in point of fact"? Does it mean that every worshipper, whether he associates others with Allah or not, is acceptable to Allah? 'Abd al-Qadir answers this question in another section of the *Mawaqif* in his exegesis of the words of the Meccan idolaters quoted by Allah in Sura al-An'am "Those who ascribe partners to Allah shall say, 'Had Allah willed, we had not worshipped others, nor had our fathers; Nor had we prohibited the least thing'" (Koran 6:148):

This is truth intended as falsehood, that is: "If Allah had willed us not to associate others with Him, we wouldn't have associated them with Him; and if Allah had not willed that we prohibit anything, we wouldn't have done so, for nothing

we do occurs except what He wills." And it is true; but the way this truth is intended as a falsehood is that they claim that everything Allah has willed for His servants is acceptable and liked by Him.

And this is a falsity, for Allah Most High wills for His servants whatever He knows from them preeternally. And that which He knows from them preeternally is whatever is entailed by what they most truly *are*, which they seek through their primal disposition, be it good or evil, pure monotheism (tawhid) or unbelief (kufr). For His will is subject to His knowledge, and His knowledge is subject to what He knows, and what He knows includes both the guided person and the lost, the affirmer of pure monotheism (muwahhid) and the associater of others with Him (mushrik), the damned and the saved, the truthful and the liar. The beings that He Most High has created are the sites of manifestation (madhahir) of His names, and there are those of His names which entail beauty and mercy, this being the share of those who are saved, the "People of the Right Handful"; and there are others of them that entail rigor and subjugation, this being the share of those who are damned, the "People of the Left Handful."

So Allah's *willing* something is not the sign of His *love* for it and acceptance of it, for "And He is not pleased with unbelief—for His servants' sake" [Koran 39:7], though He has *willed* the unbelief of many of them. His will is only a sign of His beginningless eternal knowledge of that which He would will for endless eternity. If everything He willed for His servants were goodness, it would entail that His sending the prophetic messengers and appointing their laws was futile. For they came with commands and prohibitions, and explained the Right Handful and the Left Handful, as He says: "Some shall be forever wretched, and others in bliss" [Koran 11:105] (*al-Mawaqif* [61], 1.469–70: 236).

So at the level of creation and destiny, everything is the will of God, and in a sense, all religions, according to 'Abd al-Qadir's viewpoint, are "worship" of the Deity. But at the level of validity

and salvation, only the worship that conforms to what the prophets (upon whom be peace) have brought is acceptable to Allah.

Divine Will Versus Divine Acceptance

In the former of the two passages I have just translated above from the *Mawaqif*, 'Abd al-Qadir explains that the *mushrik* or 'one who associates others with the worship of Allah' is in a sense "worshipping" God by the fact that he ascribes attributes of the Deity to the object of his worship, which he only worships for their sake, though he has "proved ignorant of the Reality [Deserving Worship] in point of fact" (*al-Mawaqif* [61], 1.33: 8). And in the latter passage translated, 'Abd al-Qadir contrasts the *will* of God in creating the *mushrik* and his "worship," from the *acceptance* of Allah, which applies to neither, for he mentions "both the guided person and the lost, the affirmer of pure monotheism (muwahhid) and the associater of others with Him (mushrik), the damned and the saved, the truthful and the liar" (*al-Mawaqif* [61], 1.469: 236). There is little doubt here as to who is who: the *muwahhid* is saved, the *mushrik* is damned.

Whatever exception may be taken at the above use of "worship," one thing that it certainly does not entail is the *validity* and *acceptability* to God of all forms of this worship. In the whole discussion, Emir 'Abd al-Qadir closely follows Ibn al-'Arabi, who says:

> Allah says, "Your Lord has ruled that you are to worship none but Him" [Koran 17:23], that is, has *determined*, and for His sake have the gods been worshipped, for no one is intended by the worship of any worshipper except God, since nothing is worshipped for its own sake but Allah. The associater of others with Allah (mushrik) but makes the mistake of setting up for himself a worship in a particular way not given to him by God, and so is damned for that (fa shaqiya li dhalik). For they say of those they associate with Him, "We but worship them so they may bring us nearer in intimate closeness to Allah" [Koran 39:3], thus acknowledging Him (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* [48], I 405.31–33).

It is difficult to agree completely with Ibn al-'Arabi and 'Abd al-Qadir's interpretation here of "Your Lord has *ruled*" (qada Rabbuka) as meaning "Your Lord has *determined*" (*hakama*, i.e. brought about), as opposed to meaning *amara* or 'commanded,' the interpretation of other exegetes, for the latter is attested to by the remainder of the verse, "[Your Lord has ruled that you are to worship none but Him,] and to show all kindness to parents" (Koran 17:23), where if *ruled* (qada) meant 'determined' (hakama), it would entail that every behavior in the created world towards parents may be termed "kindness," which is not the case.

Ibn al-'Arabi ascribes his interpretation to *kashf* or 'spiritual intuition' (*al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* [48], III 117.8) rather than contextual or other conventional exegetical evidence—a private understanding that few ordinary readers can follow him in—but in any case his explicit words "and so is damned for that (fa shaqiya li dhalik)" leave little doubt about the acceptability of such worship in his eyes. If there were any doubt, the same thought can be found in many other passages of the *Futuhat*, such as his description of the four groups who shall never leave the hellfire, the second of whom is those who associate others with Allah (mushrikun), a *mushrik* being someone who "affirms the existence of Allah, being unable to deny it, but Satan makes him associate others besides Allah in His divinity" (ibid., I 302.9), a sin which he notes in another section is "among those enormities that are never forgiven" (ibid., I 749.16).

The upshot of these texts is that Ibn al-'Arabi, like 'Abd al-Qadir and all Sunni Muslims, clearly distinguishes between the divine *will*, which pertains to every created thing, and the divine *acceptance*, which only pertains to things the Sacred Law deems good. This returns us to our starting point, the word of Allah in Sura Al 'Imran that "whoever seeks anything as a religion but complete submission to Allah [lit. "Islam"], shall not have it accepted of him, and in the afterlife shall be of the ruined" (Koran 3:85).

The Fate of Non-Muslims in the Afterlife

The reason that contemporary writers influenced by the writings of Guénon and Schuon, such as the above authors, seem to want

the universal validity of all religions at any price, even that of attributing it to masters like Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi ("in principle") or Emir 'Abd al-Qadir ("he protected the Christians against massacre by taking them into his own home because he understood" [as if other scholars considered massacring them halal]) would seem to be the emotive impalatability of followers of other religions going to hell. Where is the mercy? Would Allah put someone in the hellfire merely for worshipping in another religion besides Islam? This question, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is answered by traditional Islam according to two possibilities:

1. There are some peoples who have not been reached by the message of the Prophet of Islam (Allah bless him and give him peace) that we must worship the One God alone, associating nothing else with Him. As we have seen, such people are innocent and will not be punished no matter what they do, for Allah says in Sura al-Isra', "Nor ever would We punish until We had sent a messenger" (Koran 17:15).

These include, for example, Christians and others who lived in the period after the spread of the myth of Jesus' godhood, until the time of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace), who renewed the call to pure monotheism.

As detailed above, Imam Ghazali includes in this category those who have only been reached with a distorted picture of the Messenger of Islam (Allah bless him and give him peace), presumably including many people in the West today who know nothing about Allah's religion but newspaper stories about Ayatollahs and mad Muslim bombers. Is it within such people's capacity to believe? In Ghazali's view, such people are excused until after they have had an opportunity to learn the undistorted truth about Islam (*Faysal al-tafriqa* [32], 3.96). This of course does not alter our own obligation as Muslims to reach them with the *da'wa* or invitation to Islam.

2. A second group of people consists of those who turn away from God's divine message of Islam, rejecting the command to make their worship God's alone; whether because of blindly imitating the religion of their ancestors, or for some other reason.

These are people to whom God has sent a prophetic messenger and reached with His message, and to whom He has given hearing and an intellect with which to grasp it—but after all this, persist in associating others with Allah, either by actually worshipping another, or by rejecting the laws brought by His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace), which associates their own customs with His prerogative to be worshipped as He directs. Such people have violated God's rights, and have accepted to go to hell, which is precisely what His messengers have warned them of, so they have no excuse: "Truly, Allah forgives not that partners should be ascribed to Him; but forgives whatever is less than that to whomever He wills" (Koran 4:48).

In either case, Allah's mercy exists, though for non-Muslims unreached by the message, it is a question of divine amnesty for their ignorance, not a confirmation of their religions' validity. It is worth knowing the difference between these two things, for the correctness of one's tenets of faith and hence eternal fate depend on it.

Possibility and the Divine Will

An important question arises here; namely, that since Allah alone is absolute, and all forms (presumably including religious ones) are relative, why could He not transcend the forms given in the Islamic revelation; that is, if He can do anything, why should it be impossible for Him to simply "forgive everyone"?

The answer involves the concept of *al-wajib al-'aradi* or the contingently necessary, which is part of traditional Islamic 'aqida (tenets of faith), and thus well known to scholars like Ibn al-'Arabi and 'Abd al-Qadir, but perhaps not familiar to many contemporary Muslims. It is arguably among the most important points one can learn from classic works of 'aqida.

The possible or impossible for Allah Most High involves the divine attribute of *qudra* or omnipotence, "what He can do." This attribute in turn relates exclusively to the intrinsically possible, not to what is intrinsically impossible, as Allah says, "Verily Allah has power over all things" (Koran 2:20), *thing* meaning only what in principle can exist. For example, if one asks "Can Allah create

a square circle?" the answer is that His omnipotence does not relate to it, for a "square circle" does not refer to anything that in principle could exist: the speaker does not have a distinct idea of what he means, but is merely using a jumble of words.

Similarly, if one were to ask, "Can Allah terminate His own existence?" the answer is that the divine omnipotence does not relate to this; it is intrinsically impossible (mustahil dhati), for the divine nature necessarily entails the divine perfections, of which Being is one. It is impossible that Allah could cease to have this perfection or any other, for otherwise He would not be God.

There are thus things that are necessarily true of God (that He cannot *not* be); and their opposites, things which are necessarily impossible of God. As regards the question above, the choice "to forgive everyone," that is, to simply suspend the implications of the Koranic verses and hadiths that indicate that some classes of people will never leave hell, is not intrinsically impossible (mustahil dhati) for Allah, in that it does not involve something inherently impossible as does the "square circle," or negate something inherently true by the very nature of the Divine. Then why didn't any scholar ever think of it? Because for Islamic orthodoxy, there is another class of both the necessary and the impossible that the divine attribute of omnipotence (qudra) has no relation to; namely, that which is necessary or impossible because, although not so *a priori*, it has *become* necessary or impossible by being connected with the knowledge ('ilm) of Allah and His beginninglessly eternal attribute of speech, in His informing us of it.

For example, Abu Lahab was born with the same chance as anyone to hear the Prophet's message (Allah bless him and give him peace), enter Islam, and reach paradise. But when he persecuted the Muslims, and Sura al-Masad (Koran 111) was subsequently revealed, Allah manifested His beginninglessly eternal knowledge that Abu Lahab was of the people of hell. Although initially this outcome was merely contingent and possible, when the eternal Word of Allah connected with it, it became necessary, final, and inabrogable, for Allah only informs of what is in His knowledge, and His knowledge only conforms to what truly *is*,

which is why "naught can alter the words of Allah" (Koran 6:34), for otherwise His words would express ignorance, an attribute impossible for God, or lies, which equally contradict the nature of the Divine, as He has informed us of by saying, "His word is utter truth" (Koran 6:73), "And who is truer in word than Allah?" (Koran 4:87), and other verses.

Abu Lahab is thus necessarily of the people of hell, something "necessary" not logically or inherently, but "contingently necessary," because of the contingent circumstance of Allah having informed us of it. Everything that Allah has informed us of belongs to this class of thing, and divine omnipotence (qudra) does not relate to their contrary, for His Word shall be realized exactly as He has said, and it is impossible that any of it be nullified.

This is why for Sufis like Ibn al-'Arabi and Emir 'Abd al-Qadir, the revealed law in a sense partakes of the Divine, for it returns to Allah's attribute of *speech*, in the Koran, and to the "unrecited revelation" of the sunna of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) which is Allah's *act* of inspiration—both of which are inseparable in principle from Allah's entity. For such Sufis, the shari'a *is* the *haqiqa*, and this is, after all, the position of Islam itself. To answer our question here, its first premise that "Allah alone is absolute, and all forms are relative," is plainly wrong, and contradicted by the manifold existence of Allah's determinations (ahkam), which, though "*contingently* necessary" (wajib 'aradi) rather than inherently so, are no less absolute than the Divine itself.

Muslim Believers in the Truth of All Religions

On the universal validity of all religions, as also on other major questions such as the eternality of heaven and hell, many of us know Muslims who believe the opposite of orthodox Islam, perhaps due to a literary and intellectual environment in which any and every notion about this world and the next can be expressed, in which novelty is highly valued, and in which tradition has little authority.

Imam Nawawi says that the ruling for people who deny what is necessarily known of Islam is that they are considered apostates

and unbelievers "unless they are new Muslims, or have been raised in a far wilderness or the like, of those who might well be unaware of it. Such a person should be taught the truth, and only if he then continues as before is he considered a non-Muslim" (*Sharh Muslim* [75], 1.150).

If one reflects on this passage, it is clear that the ignorance it excuses is simple ignorance (jahl basit), not compounded ignorance (jahl murakkab). *Simple ignorance* is merely not knowing, and can be corrected by being taught the truth. But *compounded ignorance* is not knowing while *not knowing* that one does not know, thinking rather that one knows. Such a person, if "taught the truth," will often merely hold fast to his ignorance because he believes it *is* the truth. Imam Ghazali remarks that if such a person is refuted by evidence, he will usually persist anyway, assuming that others of his persuasion more learned than he could rebut the argument if they wanted (*Ihya' 'ulum al-din* [33], 1.36). For that matter, heresies are termed *ahwa'* in Arabic (plural of *hawa* or 'stubborn folly') because those who hold them cannot be dissuaded by any reasoned evidence.

Belief in the universal validity of all religions has become in our times not simple, but compounded ignorance. After its origin with René Guénon, it has burgeoned, mainly among twentieth-century European Muslim and other writers associated with the Perennial Philosophy of Frithjof Schuon, known collectively as the Traditionalist Movement. It produced a much-needed critique of modernity, but also championed the universal validity of all religions. A history published by Oxford University Press in 2004 on the movement's genesis and growth says:

> In the period 1950–99 Schuon and 23 other identified followers published some 220 books. Eighty of these were well enough received to be translated into other languages (135 translations in total) or to go into new editions. Thirty were major works . . . all going through multiple editions with several publishers in various languages (*Against the Modern World* [89], 167).

The result is that almost anyone browsing through the Religions section of a Western bookstore today is likely to find such books, compounding the ignorance. In such an intellectual climate, even if Imam Nawawi and others cite only *simple* ignorance, such as from having "been raised in a far wilderness," as an excuse for lack of basic knowledge about Islam—it seems fitter in our day to suspend judgement upon the *compounded* ignorance of those holding such beliefs who nonetheless identify themselves as Muslims. Mere religious integrity entails that we explain their mistake. But after explaining the matter, in view of the wide dissemination of these ideas and the great many of "those who might well be unaware of it," we suspend judgement in this world on whether they have been reached by the message or not, and consign their fate in the hereafter to Allah, the Final Judge. May He give everyone to know the truth.

TO return to our initial question, the "universal validity of all religions" is a heterodox view that has nothing to do with Islam or the awliya of Islam. To impute it to Ibn al-'Arabi or Emir 'Abd al-Qadir is not just wishful thinking, but bad philology. However long it enjoys its current academic vogue, it must one day die the natural death of every fashion. Until it does, its widespreadness does not make it any more correct, and when the terms and concepts of traditional Islam that contextualize Ibn al-'Arabi's worldview dawn on modern interpreters, things will change, and Allah's truth remain.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

THIRD question asked about other religions was: Imam Tabari says of the verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness, they shall have their wage with their Lord, and are not to be feared for, nor shall they grieve" (Koran 2:62) that God does not abrogate a promise, though He may abrogate a particular religious usage. Is there a contradiction between this and Imam Nawawi's saying, "Someone who does not believe that whoever follows another religion besides Islam is an unbeliever (such as Christians), or doubts that such a person is an unbeliever, or considers their sect to be valid, is himself an unbeliever (kafir) even if he manifests Islam and believes in it"?

Parochialism in Previous Faiths

The significance of the verse quoted here by Tabari, and indeed the wider context of this question, is the universality of Islam. One cannot understand what it means, and does not mean, without reflecting for a moment on the exaggerated parochialism of the "People of the Book," the Jews and Christians, which Islam came to rectify, expressed by Allah in Sura al-Baqara with the words

> And they say: "None shall enter paradise but Jews or Christians"—those are their idle wishes. Say: "Bring your decisive proof if you speak the truth." By no means: Whoever humbles his face to Allah and excels in good, his wage

> shall be with his Lord; and they need never be feared for, nor shall they grieve. The Jews have said, "The Christians are upon nothing," and the Christians have said, "The Jews are upon nothing," while both read the scripture. And those who know not say the same as they. So Allah shall judge between them on Resurrection Day on that upon which they disagree (Koran 2:111–13).

The Jews said, "The Christians are upon nothing," because for the Jews salvation entailed being racially Jewish, and they did not acknowledge Jesus (upon whom be peace) as a prophet. The Christians said, "The Jews are upon nothing," because Judaism originated long before the "Great Redemption" of man by Jesus Christ (upon whom be peace) that rendered their ancient heritage irrelevant, and they could have no historical share in. The point of the verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness, they shall have their wage with their Lord, and are not to be feared for, nor shall they grieve" (Koran 2:62) is that the message of Islam, as "submission" to God, is not exclusive but rather universal: for all men and for all time. Its followers were commanded to say: "In Allah do we believe, and in what has been sent down to us, and sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus and given the prophets from their Lord: we differ between none of them, and to Him do we submit" (Koran 2:136). Islam was a universal message addressed to all peoples of the world, affirming that all previous peoples who believed in the messenger of their time were also saved, and that none was disadvantaged by being born before the times of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace). Rather, all who had followed Allah's revealed religion in their times "shall have their wage with their Lord"; and "are not to be feared for" by having missed salvation because of not being racially Jewish or because of being born prior to Christ's "redemption" of subsequent Christian mankind; and "nor shall they grieve," because Allah does not send those of faith and works to hell for not belonging to a group physically impossible to belong to.

Truth, Description, and Promise

In chapter 17 above, we identified three types of religious truth:

1. The truth of believing in the Oneness of God and eternal verities of faith, a truth which pertains to the mind;

2. The truth of working righteousness by submitting to the rules of God revealed by His messenger, the prophet of one's time, which pertains to the body;

3. And the truth of being, the consciousness of closeness to the Divine, that results from sincerity in practicing the previous two kinds of truth, and which pertains to the inmost soul.

Now, the present question deals with abrogation (naskh), which, if we think about it for a moment, can only concern the second of these types of truth, as Tabari observes in his commentary on the verse "Whatever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better, or the like of; Know you not that Allah has power over all things?" (Koran 2:106), of which he explains:

> That is to say, He makes the permissible impermissible, the impermissible permissible, the lawful unlawful, or the unlawful lawful—which only applies to commands or prohibitions, interdictions or lifting interdictions, forbidding things or making them permissible. As for descriptions (akhbar), nothing can abrogate or be abrogated by them (*Tafsir al-Tabari* [102], 1.475).

Tabari rightly observes that descriptions are inabrogable because a *description of* something, in Arabic *khabar*; literally "report," can only be true or false, which intrinsically precludes its abrogation. As for promises, Tabari does not mention them in the above passage about abrogation, though he apparently sees no objection to their being abrogated, since he ascribes such an opinion to Ibn 'Abbas regarding the very verse we are examining (Koran 2:62), relating through his chain of transmission that

> Ibn 'Abbas reports that the verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteous-

ness, they shall have their wage with their Lord, and are not to be feared for, nor shall they grieve" [Koran 2:62] was followed by Allah's revealing "Whoever seeks anything as a religion but complete submission to Allah [lit. "Islam"], shall not have it accepted of him, and in the afterlife shall be of the ruined" [Koran 3:85]—this report [of Ibn 'Abbas] indicating that Allah (Exalted be His praise) had promised whoever did righteous deeds of the Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans that they would attain to paradise in the next world for their works, but *then abrogated this* (thumma nasakha dhalik) by saying, "Whoever seeks anything as a religion but complete submission to Allah (Islam), shall not have it accepted of him" [Koran 3:85] (*Tafsir al-Tabari* [102], 1.323).

Tabari, however, does not seem to believe that the promise had been abrogated, as Ibn 'Abbas thought, but rather that the correct understanding of the verse "Verily those who believe . . ." (Koran 2:62) is conditioned upon two other reports, one conveyed by Suddi (d. 127/745) and the other by Mujahid (d. 104/722), to each of which we now turn.

The Suddi Hadith

Suddi relates the lengthy story of Salman the Persian's coming to Islam, telling of his conversion first to Christianity from Zoroastrianism after meeting a Christian monk, and how he travelled to one sage after the next, serving each until their death, until the last one told him that a prophet was about to appear, saying: "I do not think that I shall live to see him, but you are a young man, and are likely to live to see him. He will come forth in the land of the Arabs." The account continues to when at last Salman met the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in Medina, and

while he was talking with him, Salman remembered his former companions, and told the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) how they had been, saying, "They used to fast, pray, and believe in you, and they testified that you would be sent as a prophet." When Salman had finished praising them, the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him

peace) told him, "Salman, they are of the denizens of hell." And that distressed Salman greatly, for he had said to him, "Had they met you they would have believed and followed you." So Allah revealed this verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day . . ." (*Tafsir al-Tabari* [102], 1.323).

The Mujahid Hadith

The second hadith is from Mujahid, also about the conversion of Salman to Islam and the subsequent revealing of the verse "Verily those who believe . . ." In this account,

> Salman told the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) about those Christians and what he had seen of their works, and he replied, "They did not die believing in Islam." Salman said, "The whole earth darkened around me," and he recounted their spiritual rigors. Then this verse [Koran 2:62] was revealed, so the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) summoned Salman and told him, "This verse has been revealed about your companions." Then he added, "Whoever dies believing in the religion of Jesus and in submission [lit. "upon Islam"] before he hears of me is in a goodly state. But whoever hears of me today and does not believe in me has perished" (*Tafsir al-Tabari* [102], 1.323).

Tabari comments:

> Therefore, the correct interpretation (ta'wil) of the verse is what we have just mentioned from Mujahid and Suddi; that those who believe of this Umma, and those who were Jews, and the Christians, and Sabaeans: whoever believed—of the Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans—in God and the Last Day, "they shall have their wage with their Lord, and are not to be feared for, nor shall they grieve." The interpretation we first mentioned [in his Koranic exegesis a few pages earlier, that "whoever believes in and acknowledges the Resurrection after death on Judgement Day, and does good deeds, obeying God, shall have their reward with their Lord" (ibid.,

320)] is closest to the literal content of the text, for Allah (exalted be His praise) has not chosen one segment of humanity above the rest in rewarding good works when they are accompanied by true faith (ibid., 323–24).

Abrogation of Covenants

For Tabari, it is not Allah's promises but rather His *akhbar* or descriptions that are in principle inabrogable; for example, descriptions of the divine attributes, paradise, hell, the lives of the prophets, the fate of previous peoples, and so forth, none of which are subject to abrogation because they merely describe what *is*, and to change such information in any way would not "abrogate" it, but falsify it.

But even if Tabari does not say that Allah's promises are inabrogable—indeed, as we have seen above he believes that "Ibn 'Abbas was of the opinion that Allah (exalted be His praise) first promised whoever did righteous deeds of the Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans that they would attain to paradise in the next world for their works, but then *abrogated* this by saying, 'Whoever seeks anything as a religion but complete submission to Allah [lit. "Islam"], shall not have it accepted of him' [Koran 3:85]" (*Tafsir al-Tabari* [102], 1.323)—it is nevertheless certainly true that Allah does not break promises, for He says: "Allah breaks not His solemn promise; but most men know not" (Koran 30:6), and says, "Verily indeed the promise of Allah is true; but most of them know not" (Koran 10:55).

Allah's keeping His promises, however, is not contradicted by the position reported here from Ibn 'Abbas that the promise itself contained in the verse "Verily those who believe . . ." (Koran 2:62) was subsequently abrogated. For reflection shows that there are two kinds of promises: "unconditional" and "conditional."

An example of an *unconditional* promise is promising one's son a gift. Here, if no conditions exist, not to give him the gift would amount to breaking one's promise.

An example of a *conditional* promise is offering one's son a few dollars to do some grocery shopping. In such a case, if one had to get the groceries oneself because the son didn't have time,

the offer would obviously no longer stand. It would be abrogated by the mere fact that it was not taken advantage of, and this would not be a "broken promise." The promise would only be broken by letting one's son do the shopping, then not giving him the money. It is plain that such a conditional promise is an "offer" that as such may be rescinded or changed at any time before the recipient avails himself of it without this breaking the promise.

Religious practices take the form of conditional promises from God to man. To attain God's favor, mercy, or love, man is told that he must do something. The wisdom in this is that the aim of religion is to bind the heart of man to God, and people naturally exalt whatever their will is directed to. For this reason no prophet has ever confined himself to high-flown words or sentiments, but rather all taught mankind spiritual works, such as prayer, fasting, helping the oppressed, and so forth. Preaching may be forgotten, but not one's own hopes and works. When, for example, Abraham (upon whom be blessings and peace) asked God to extend His covenant unconditionally to all his descendants, he was told, "Verily, My covenant extends not to the wrongdoers" (Koran 2:124). That is, in order to apply to them, the covenant had to be specifically religious, that is, based upon performance.

This conditionality of religious covenants is why God's abrogation of one religion with another does not break His promise to followers of the first. If we reflect for a moment upon this as a historical process, we find that first, most of those to whom the initial conditional promise was made are different people from those to whom the subsequent one is made; and second, those living between the two religions in time or place have either the capacity to accept the new message if they hear of it, or the favor of a divine amnesty if they do not, as previously remarked. Abrogation, then, entails three things:

1. That Allah has made and kept His promise to a previous people, as in the verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness, they shall have their

wage with their Lord, and are not to be feared for, nor shall they grieve" (Koran 2:62);

2. That this entails, when taken with Allah's word "Nor would We ever punish until We had sent a messenger" (Koran 17:15), that Allah continues to keep His ancient promise to those unreached by the new covenant until they are able to hear and understand it;

3. And that a new faith has been given to subsequent peoples that more than fulfills the promise of the first one, as Allah says of abrogation in a more particular, though relevant, context: "Whatever verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better, or the like of; Know you not that Allah has power over all things?" (Koran 2:106).

The Old and New Testament

That God's promise is fulfilled rather than broken by abrogation is familiar to Christians, who universally acknowledge that the promise of the Old Testament has now been abrogated, or in their words "fulfilled" by the promise of the New Testament. Jesus (upon whom be peace) is reported to have said therein: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17–18); meaning that if men follow the new covenant, they shall have everything they were promised for following the previous law and more. Far from denying this, Muslims raise it to a universal principle, affirming that to adhere to the true religion of one's time means to follow the precept and example of the messenger sent to that time.

For Muslims, the reported words of Jesus Christ (upon whom be peace) "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6) could have been said by any prophet whatsoever. Because the prophet of each time represents God as His emissary and messenger, Moses could truthfully say to the children of Israel, "Your murmurings are not against us [Moses and Aaron], but against the Lord" (Exodus

16:8); and so too, the word "Father" in Jesus' utterance here, assuming it is authentic, must be understood according to ancient Semitic idiom to signify not one's immediate male ancestor, but rather the fatherly concern of God for the faithful, as Christ himself (upon whom be peace) used the word when he taught men to pray: "*Our* Father which art in heaven . . ." (Matthew 6:9). That is, Jesus' words (upon him be peace) "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6), granting their authenticity, would have been no less inexorable, categorical, and absolute for everyone reached by his message in those times than are the words of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) for everyone reached by his message in ours: "By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad, no person of this whole world community shall hear of me, neither Jew nor Christian, then die and not believe in what I have been sent with, save he will be of the dwellers of hell" (*Muslim* [74], 1.134: 153. 8).

Keeping the Faith

Being a "believer" in any time thus means following the prophet of that time. In our own time, it means believing in the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace), to deny which is to deny the word of Allah in the Koran "We have not sent you [O Muhammad] except to *all people entirely* (kaffatan li al-nas), a bringer of glad tidings and a mighty warner; But most people know not" (Koran 34:28), in which the phrase *kaffatan li al-nas* has no other lexical sense than "to all people entirely," which is why after the advent of Islam the words "whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness" (Koran 2:62) can only refer in *previous* ages to followers of their own prophets, and in our times to the followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) now that he has been sent to the entire world with Islam. In consequence of this unambiguous proof that Islam is addressed to all people without exception, Nawawi says, "Someone who does not believe that whoever follows another religion besides Islam [today] is an unbeliever (such as Christians), or doubts that such a person is an unbeliever, or considers their sect to be valid, is himself an unbeliever (kafir)

even if he manifests Islam and believes in it" (*Rawda al-talibin* [81], 10.70).

The other three schools of Sunni jurisprudence, whose principal legal works we have cited above in chapter 18, unanimously concur with Imam Nawawi on this, and that to deny it is to deny the Koran. As Ibn Kathir explains about the "belief" of the Jews and Christians in the verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness . . ." (Koran 2:62):

> The *belief* of the Jews was that of whoever adhered to the Torah and the sunna of Moses (upon whom be peace) until the coming of Jesus. When Jesus came, whoever held fast to the Torah and the sunna of Moses without giving them up and following Jesus was lost.
>
> The *belief* of the Christians was that whoever adhered to the Evangel and precepts of Jesus, their faith was valid and acceptable until the coming of Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace). Those of them who did not then follow Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) and give up the sunna of Jesus and the Evangel were lost.
>
> The foregoing is not contradicted by the hadith relating that the verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day. . ." (Koran 2:62) was followed by Allah's revealing: "Whoever seeks anything as a religion but complete submission to Allah (Islam), shall not have it accepted of him, and in the afterlife shall be of the ruined" [Koran 3:85], for the hadith merely confirms that no one's way or spiritual works are acceptable unless they conform to the Sacred Law of Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) now that he has been sent with it. As for people prior to this, anyone who followed the messenger of his own time was guided, on the right path, and was saved (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir* [54], 1.283).

This is Islam's universalism, and its particularism. While Islam *is* universal in acknowledging the truth of all revealed faiths of

other times and places, it is also particular in its understanding that faith today is a conditional promise from God, in effect a new "offer" that one accepts by becoming Muslim. Its very conditionality, which is to say its specifically *religious* character, means that it is based on what a man *does*, not what a man is, meaning that it must apply equally to all people on the face of the earth regardless of race, creed, or circumstance. There is no disagreement among traditional scholars about this, or any discoverable contradiction between Tabari's treatment of the verse and the words of Imam Nawawi.

A Conflict of Interpretations

The foregoing having been said, as noted in the previous chapter most of us know Muslims who, to paraphrase Nawawi, do not believe that whoever follows another religion besides Islam is an unbeliever (such as Christians), or they doubt that such a person is an unbeliever. Indeed, the writings of many Western Muslims other than those mentioned in that chapter seem to suggest this, such as the late Austrian convert to Islam Muhammad Asad, who in a footnote to his translation of the Koran comments upon the verse "Verily those who believe, and those of Jewry, the Christians, the Sabaeans: whoever shall believe in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness, they shall have their wage with their Lord, and are not to be feared for, nor shall they grieve" (Koran 2:62):

> The above passage—which recurs in the Koran several times—lays down a fundamental doctrine of Islam. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, the idea of "salvation" is here made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgement, and righteous action in life. The statement of this doctrine at this juncture—that is, in the midst of an appeal to the children of Israel—is warranted by the false Jewish belief that their descent from Abraham entitles them to be regarded as "God's chosen people" (*The Message of the Qur'an* [5], 14).

There are a few inaccuracies in Muhammad Asad's note. For one, in "the above passage" (Koran 2:62), "righteous action in life," for all time after the verse, is conditional upon the *divine acceptance.* This means that it is defined by Allah's current covenant, which is *Islam*, not previous faiths now abrogated by God or altered at the hands of men. Second, the children of Israel were indeed "God's chosen people," but in their own *times*, when they truly did have "faith in Allah and the Last Day and work righteousness," not after they rejected the subsequent messengers. Third, neither of these is as material to our discussion as the profound conflict between Islamic orthodoxy and Muhammad Asad's main point here—that any faith conventionally regarded to possess these "three elements" is acceptable to God. The legal ruling stated by Imam Nawawi and the other schools of fiqh entails grave consequences for those who construe the verse thus, unless they understand and correct their mistake. May Allah inspire all of us to accept the Truth, humbly and devotedly as servants.

CHAPTER TWENTY

EVOLUTION

EVOLUTION theory weighs in as a fair contender in our times to revalue all things, from reason and revelation to man himself. I received a letter some years ago from a Muslim in England which read, in part: "Recently a pamphlet has been circulated around Oxford saying that 'evolution is synonymous with kufr and *shirk* [conjoining others with Allah].' I myself am a biologist and am convinced by the evidence which supports the theory of evolution. I am writing to ask whether the Koranic account of Creation is incompatible with man having evolved."

Theories and Facts

I wrote as follows: During my "logic of scientific explanation" period at the University of Chicago, I used to think that scientific theories had to have coherence, logicality, applicability, and adequacy, and I was accustomed to examine theory statements by looking at these things in turn. Perhaps they furnish a reasonable point of departure to give your question an answer which, if cursory and somewhat personal, may yet shed some light on the issues you raise.

Coherence

It seems to me that the very absoluteness of the theory's conclusions tends to compromise its "objective" character. It is all very well to speak of the "evidence of evolution," but if the theory is

thorough-going, then *human consciousness* itself is also governed by evolution. This means that the categories that allow observation statements to arise as "facts," categories such as number, space, time, event, measurement, logic, causality, and so forth are mere physiological accidents of *random mutation* and *natural selection* in a particular species, Homo sapiens. They have not come from any scientific considerations, but rather have arbitrarily arisen in man by blind and fortuitous evolution for the purpose of preserving the species. They need not reflect external reality, "the way nature is," objectively, but only to the degree useful in preserving the species. That is, nothing guarantees the primacy, the objectivity, of these categories over others that would have presumably arisen had our consciousness evolved along different lines, such as those of more distant, say, aquatic or subterranean species. The cognitive basis of every statement within the theory thus proceeds from the unreflective, unexamined historical forces that produced "consciousness" in one species, a cognitive basis that the theory nevertheless generalizes to the whole universe of theory statements (the explanation of the origin of species) without explaining what permits this generalization. The pretences of the theory to correspond to an objective order of reality, applicable in an absolute sense to all species, are simply not compatible with the consequences of a thoroughly evolutionary viewpoint, which entails that the human cognitive categories that underpin the theory are purely relative and species-specific. The absolutism of random mutation and natural selection as explanative principles ends in eating the theory. With all its statements simultaneously absolute and relative, objective and subjective, generalizable and ungeneralizable, scientific and species-specific, the theory runs up on a reef of methodological incoherence.

Logicality

Speaking for myself, I was convinced that the evolution of man was an unchallengeable "given" of modern knowledge until I read Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*. The ninth chapter (*The Origin of Species* [25], 291–317) made it clear, from what Darwin modestly calls the "great imperfection of the geological record,"

that the theory was *not in principle falsifiable*, though the possibility that some kind of evidence or another should be able in principle to disprove a theory is a condition (if we can believe logicians like Karl Popper) for it to be considered scientific. By its nature, fossil evidence of intermediate forms that could prove or disprove the theory remained unfound and unfindable. When I read this, it was not clear to me how such a theory could be called "scientific."

If evolution is not scientific, then what is it? It seems to me that it is a human interpretation, an endeavor, an industry, a literature, based on what the American philosopher Charles Peirce called *abductive reasoning*, which functions in the following way:

1. Surprising fact A.
2. If theory B were the case, then A would naturally follow.
3. Therefore B is true.

Here, (1) alone is certain, (2) is merely probable (as it explains the facts, though does not preclude other possible theories), while (3) has only the same probability as (2). If you want to see how ironclad the case for the evolution of man is, make a list of all the fossils discovered so far that "prove" the evolution of man from lower life forms, date them, and then ask yourself if abductive reasoning is not what urges it, and if it really precludes the possibility of quite a different (2) in place of the theory of evolution.

Applicability

Is the analogy from micro-evolution within a species (which is fairly well-attested to by breeding horses, pigeons, useful plant hybrids, and so on) applicable to *macro-evolution*, from one species to another? That is, is there a single example of one species actually evolving into another, with the intermediate forms represented in the fossil record?

In the 1970s, Peter Williamson of Harvard University, under the direction of Richard Leakey, examined 3,300 fossils from digs around Lake Turkana, Kenya, spanning several million years of the history of thirteen species of mollusks, that seemed to provide clear evidence of evolution from one species to another. He published his findings five years later in *Nature* magazine, and *Newsweek* picked up the story:

> Though their existence provides the basis for paleontology, fossils have always been something of an embarrassment to evolutionists. The problem is one of "missing links": the fossil record is so littered with gaps that it takes a truly expert and imaginative eye to discern how one species could have evolved into another. . . . But now, for the first time, excavations at Kenya's Lake Turkana have provided clear fossil evidence of evolution from one species to another. The rock strata there contain a series of fossils that show every small step of an evolutionary journey that seems to have proceeded in fits and starts ("Evolution: Change at a Snail's Pace," *Newsweek* [15], 7 December 1981).

Without dwelling on the *facticity* of scientific hypotheses raised under *Logicality* above, or that 3,300 fossils of thirteen species only "cover" several million years if we already acknowledge that evolution is happening and are merely trying to see where the fossils fit in, we are back to Peirce's abductive reasoning here, although with a more probable minor premise because of the fuller geological record. Yet even if we grant that evolution is the "given" which the fossils "prove," an interesting point about the fossils (for a theist) is that the change was much more rapid than the traditional Darwinian mechanisms of random mutation and natural selection would warrant:

> What the record indicated was that the animals stayed much the same for immensely long stretches of time. But twice, about 2 million years ago and then again 700,000 years ago, the pool of life seemed to explode—set off, apparently, by a drop in the lake's water level. In an instant of geologic time, as the changing lake environment allowed new types of mollusks to win the race for survival, all of the species evolved into varieties sharply different from their ancestors. Such sudden evolution had been observed before. What made the Lake Turkana fossil record unique, says Williamson, is that "for the first time we see intermediate forms" between the old species and the new.
>
> That intermediate forms appeared so quickly, with new

> species suddenly evolving in 5,000 to 50,000 years after millions of years of constancy, challenges the traditional theories of Darwin's disciples. Most scientists describe evolution as a gradual process, in which random genetic mutations slowly produce new species. But the fossils of Lake Turkana don't record any gradual change; rather, they seem to reflect eons of stasis interrupted by brief evolutionary "revolutions" (ibid.).

Of what significance is this to Muslims? In point of religion, if we put our scientific scruples aside for a moment and grant that evolution is *applicable* to something in the real world, namely, the mollusks of Lake Turkana, does this constitute unbelief (kufr) by the standards of Islam? I don't think so. Classic works of Islamic 'aqida or 'tenets of faith' such as *Matn al-Sanusiyya* tell us, "As for what is possible in relation to Allah, it consists of His doing or not doing anything that is possible" (*al-Sanusiyya* [13], 30). That is, as detailed above in chapter 18, the omnipotent power of Allah can do anything that is not *impossible*, meaning either: (a) intrinsically impossible (mustahil dhati), such as "creating a five-sided triangle"—which is a mere confusion of words, and not something in any sense *possible*, such that we could ask whether Allah could do it; or else (b) impossible because of Allah having informed us that it shall not occur (mustahil 'aradi), whether He does so in the Koran, or through the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in a *mutawatir* hadith, meaning one that has reached us through so many means of transmission that it is impossible its transmitters could have all conspired to forge it. This category of the impossible is not impossible to begin with, but becomes so by the revelation from Allah, who is truthful and veracious.

With respect to evolution, the knowledge claim that Allah has brought one sort of being out of another is not *intrinsically* impossible ((a) above) because it is not self-contradictory. And as to whether it is (b), "impossible because of Allah having informed us that it cannot occur," it would seem to me that we have two different cases: that of man, and that of the rest of creation.

Man

Regarding your question whether the Koranic account of creation is incompatible with man having evolved; if evolution entails, as Darwin believed, that "probably all the organic beings which have ever lived on this earth have descended from one primordial form, into which life was first breathed" (*The Origin of Species* [25], 455), I apprehend that this is incompatible with the Koranic account of creation. Our first ancestor was the prophet Adam (upon whom be peace), who was created by Allah in *janna* or paradise, and not on earth, but also created in a particular way that He describes to us:

> When your Lord said to the angels: "Verily I am to create a man from clay; So when I have formed him well and blown into him a-kindling of My spirit, fall you down to him prostrate." So all the angels bowed down to him as one; Except Satan: he waxed proud, and was of the utter disbelievers. He said, "O Satan, what prevented you from bowing down to what I created with My own hands; Were you too haughty—Or too exalted?" He replied, "I am better than he: You created me of fire, and created him of clay" (Koran 38:71–76).

Now, the God of Islam is transcendently above any suggestion of anthropomorphism, and Koranic exegetes like Fakhr al-Din al-Razi explain the above words *created with My own* [lit. "two"] *hands* as a figurative expression of Allah's special *concern* for this particular creation, the first human, since a sovereign of immense majesty does not undertake any work "with his own hands" unless it is of the greatest importance (*Tafsir al-Razi* [85], 26.231–32). I say "the first human," because the Arabic term *bashar* used in the verse "Verily I am to create *a man* from clay" means precisely a human being and has no other lexical acceptation.

The same interpretive considerations—of Allah's transcendence above the attributes of created things—apply to the words *and blow into him a-kindling of My spirit.* Because the Koran unequivocally establishes that Allah is *Ahad* or "One," not an entity divisible into parts, exegetes say this "spirit" was a *created* one,

and that its attribution to Allah ("*My* spirit") is what is called in Arabic *idafa al-tashrif*, "an attribution of honor," showing that the *ruh* or 'spirit' within this first human being and his descendants was "a sacred, exalted, and noble substance" (ibid., 228)—not that there was a "part of Allah" such as could enter into Adam's body, which is unbelief. Similar attributions are not infrequent in Arabic, just as the Kaaba is called *bayt Allah*, or "the House of Allah," meaning "Allah's honored house," not that it is His address; or such as the she-camel sent to the people of Thamud, which was called *naqat Allah*, or "the she-camel of Allah," meaning "Allah's honored she-camel," signifying its inviolability in the shari'a of the time, not that He rode it; and so on.

All of which shows that, according to the Koran, human beings are intrinsically—by their celestial provenance in paradise, by their specially created nature, and by the *ruh* or soul within them—at a quite different level in Allah's eyes than other terrestrial life, whether or not their bodies have certain physiological affinities with it, which are the prerogative of their Maker to create. Darwin says:

> I believe that animals have descended from at most only four or five progenitors, and plants from an equal or lesser number. Analogy would lead me one step further, namely, to the belief that all animals and plants have descended from some one prototype. But analogy may be a deceitful guide (*The Origin of Species* [25], 454–55).

Indeed it may. It is the nature of the place in which Allah has created us, this world (dunya), that the possibility exists to deny the existence of Allah, His angels, His Books, His messengers, the Last Day, and destiny, its good and evil. If these things were not hidden by a veil, there would be no point in Allah's making us *responsible* for believing in them. Belief would be involuntary, like the belief, say, that Glasgow is in Scotland.

But what He has made us responsible for is precisely belief in the *unseen*. Why? In order that the divine names—such as *al-Rafi'* or "He Who Raises," *al-Khafid* "He Who Abases," *al-Mu'ti* "He Who Gives," *al-Mani'* "He Who Withholds," *al-Rahim* "the

Merciful," *al-Muntaqim* "the Avenger," *al-Latif* "the Subtly Kind," and so on—may be manifest.

How are such names manifest? Only through the levels of human felicity and perdition, of salvation and damnation, by the disparity of human spiritual attainment in all its degrees: from the profound certitude of the prophets (upon whom be peace), to the faith of the ordinary believer, to the doubts of the waverer or hypocrite, to the denials of the damned. Also, the veil for its part has a *seamless* quality. To some, it is a seamless veil of light manifesting the Divine through the perfection of creation; while to others, it is a seamless veil of darkness, a perfect nexus of interpenetrating causal relations in which there is no place for anything that is not material. Allah says:

> Exalted in Grace is He in whose hand is dominion, and He has power over everything. Who created death and life to try you, as to which of you is better in works, and He is the All-powerful, the Oft-forgiving. And who created the seven heavens in layers; you see no disparity in the creation of the All-merciful. Return your glance: do you see any gaps? (Koran 67:1–3).

The last time I checked, the university scene was a largely atheistic subculture, of professors and students actively or passively convinced that God was created by man. In bastions of liberalism like the University of California at Berkeley, for example, which still forbids the establishment of a Religion Studies Department, only this attitude will do; anything else is immature, is primitivism. The reduction of human behavior to evolutionary biology is a major journalistic missionary outreach of this movement. I am content with this, inasmuch as Allah has created it to try us, to distinguish the good from the bad, the bad from the worse. But I don't see why Muslims should accept it as an explanation of the origin of man, especially when it contradicts what we know from the Creator of Man.

Other Species

As for other cases, change from one sort of thing to another does not seem to contradict revelation, for Allah says, "O mankind,

fear your Lord who created you from a single soul [Adam, upon whom be peace], then *created of it* its mate [his wife Hawwa], then dispersed from them a vast multitude of men and women" (Koran 4:1); and also says, concerning the metamorphosis of a disobedient group of the children of Israel into apes, "And when they haughtily yet refused to forgo what they had been forbidden, We said to them, 'Be you apes, despised'" (Koran 7:166). And in a hadith:

> There shall be groups of people from my Umma who shall consider fornication, silk, wine, and musical instruments to be lawful: groups shall camp beside a high mountain, whom a shepherd returning to in the evening with one of their herds shall approach for something he needs, and they shall tell him, "Come back tomorrow." Allah shall destroy them in the night, bringing down the mountain upon them, and transforming others into apes and swine until the Day of Judgement (*Bukhari* [17], 7.138: 5590. S).

Most Islamic scholars have understood these transformations literally, which shows that Allah's changing one thing into another (again, in other than the origin of man) has not been traditionally considered to be contrary to the teachings of Islam. Indeed, the daily miracle of nutrition, the sustenance Allah provides for His creatures, in which one creature is transformed into another by being eaten, may be seen in the food chains that make up the economy of our natural world, as well as our own plates.

If, as in the theory of evolution, we conjoin with this possibility the factors of causality, gradualism, mutation, and adaptation, it does not seem to me to add anything radically different to these other forms of change. For Islamic tenets of faith do not deny causal relations as such, but rather that *causes have effects in and of themselves*, for to believe this is to ascribe a co-sharer to Allah in His actions. Whoever believes in this latter causality (as virtually all evolutionists do) is an unbeliever (kafir) without any doubt, as "whoever denies the existence of ordinary causes has made the Wisdom of Allah Most High inoperative, while whoever attributes *effects* to them has associated co-sharers (shirk) with Allah Most High" (*Miftah al-janna* [41], 33). As for Mus-

lims, they believe that Allah alone creates causes, Allah alone creates effects, and Allah alone conjoins the two. In the words of the Koran, "Allah is Creator of everything" (Koran 13:16).

A Muslim should pay careful attention to this point, and distance himself from believing either that causes (a) bring about effects in and of themselves; or (b) bring about effects in and of themselves through a capacity Allah has placed in them. Both of these negate the Oneness and soleness (wahdaniyya) of Allah, which entails that Allah has no co-sharer in:

1. His entity (dhat);

2. His attributes (sifat);

3. Or in His acts (af'al), which include the creation of the universe and everything in it, including all its cause-and-effect relationships.

This third point is negated by both (a) and (b) above, and perhaps this is what your pamphleteer at Oxford had in mind when he spoke about the shirk (ascribing a co-sharer to Allah) of evolution.

In this connection, evolution as a knowledge claim about a causal relation does not seem to me intrinsically different from other similar knowledge claims, such as the statement "The president died from an assassin's bullet." Here, though in reality Allah alone gives life or makes to die, we find a dispensation in Sacred Law to speak in this way, provided that we know and believe that Allah alone brought about this effect. As for someone who literally believes that the bullet gave the president death, such a person is a kafir. In reality he knows no more about the world than a man taking a bath who, when the water is cut off from the municipality, gets angry at the tap.

To summarize the answer to your question thus far, belief in macro-evolutionary transformation and variation of non-human species does not seem to me to entail kufr or shirk unless one also believes that such transformation came about by *random* mutation and *natural* selection, understanding these adjectives as meaning causal independence from the will of Allah. You have to look in your heart and ask yourself what you believe. From the point of view of tawhid, Islamic theism, nothing happens "at random,"

there is no "autonomous nature," and anyone who believes in either of these is necessarily beyond the pale of Islam.

Unfortunately, this seems to be exactly what most evolutionists think. In America and England, they are the ones who write the textbooks, which raises weighty moral questions about sending Muslim students to schools to be taught these atheistic premises as if they were "givens of modern science." Teaching unbelief (kufr) to Muslims as though it were a fact is unquestionably unlawful. Is this unlawfulness mitigated—made legally permissible by shari'a standards—by the necessity (darura) of upcoming generations of Muslims for scientific education? If so, the absence of textbooks and teachers in most schools who are conversant and concerned enough with the difficulties of the theory of evolution to accurately present its hypothetical character, places a moral obligation upon all Muslim parents. They are obliged to monitor their children's Islamic beliefs and to explain to them (by means of themselves, or someone else who can) the divine revelation of Islam, together with the difficulties of the theory of evolution that will enable the children to make sense of it from an Islamic perspective and understand which aspects of the theory are rejected by Islamic theism (tawhid) and which are acceptable. The question of the theory's *adequacy*, meaning its generalizability to all species, will necessarily be one of the important aspects of this explanation.

Adequacy

Of all the premises of evolution, the two that we have characterized above as unbelief (kufr)—namely, *random* mutation and *natural* selection, interpreted in a materialistic sense—are what most strongly urge its generalization to man. Why must we accept that man came from a common ancestor with animal primates, particularly since a fossil record of intermediate forms is not there? The answer of our age seems to be: "Where else should he have come from?"

It is only if we accept the premise that there is no God that this answer acquires any cogency. The Koran answers this premise in detail and with authority. But evolutionary theory is not

only ungeneralizable because of Allah informing us of His own existence and man's special creation, but because of what we discern in ourselves of the uniqueness of man, as the Koran says: "We shall without fail show them Our signs in all of the far-flung directions, and in their very selves, until it becomes utterly plain to them that it is the Truth" (Koran 41:53).

Among the greatest of these signs in man's self is his birthright as *khalifa al-Rahman*, "the full deputy of the All-merciful." If it be wondered what this deputyship consists in, the ulema of *Tasawwuf*, the scholars of Islamic spirituality, have traditionally answered that it is to be looked for in the *ma'rifa bi Llah* or 'knowledge of Allah' that is the prerogative of no other being in creation besides the believer, and which is attained through following the path of inward purification, of strengthening the heart's attachment to Allah through acts of obedience specified by Sacred Law, particularly that of dhikr.

The locus of this attachment and this knowledge is not the mind, but rather the subtle faculty within one that is sometimes called the heart, sometimes the *ruh* or spirit. Allah's special creation of this faculty has been mentioned above in connection with the Koranic words *and breathed into him a-kindling of My spirit.* According to masters of the spiritual path, this subtle body, the soul, is knowledgeable, aware, and cognizant, and when fully awakened, capable of transcending the opacity of the created universe to know Allah. The Koran says about it, by way of exalting its true nature through its very unfathomability: "Say: The soul is of the affair only of my Lord" (Koran 17:85).

Mere imagination? On the contrary, everything *besides* this knowledge is imagination, for the object of this knowledge is Allah, true reality, which cannot be transient but is unchanging, while other facts are precisely imaginary. The child you used to be, for example, exists now only in your imagination; the person who ate your breakfast this morning no longer exists except in your imagination; your yesterday, your tomorrow, your today (except, perhaps, for the moment you are presently in, which has now fled): all is imaginary, and only hypostatized as phenomenal reality, as unity, as facticity, as real—through *imagination.* Every

moment that comes is different, winking in and out of existence, preserved in its relational continuum by pure imagination, which constitutes it as "world." What we notice of this world is thus imaginary, like what a sleeper sees. In this connection, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (Allah ennoble his countenance) has said, "People are asleep, and when they die, they awaken" (*al-Maqasid al-hasana* [86], 442: 1240).

This is not to denigrate the power of imagination; indeed, if not for imagination, we could not believe in the truths of the afterlife, paradise, hell, and everything that our eternal salvation depends upon. Rather, I mention this in the context of the question of evolution as a cautionary note against a sort of "fallacy of misplaced concrescence," an unwarranted epistemological overconfidence, that exists in many people who work in what they term "the hard sciences."

As someone from the West, I was raised from early school years as a believer not only in *science*, the practical project of discovery that aims at exploiting more and more of the universe by identification, classification, and description of micro- and macro-causal relations; but also in *scientism*, the belief that this enterprise constitutes absolute knowledge. As Jurgen Habermas, a philosopher I read at Chicago, put it, "Scientism is science's belief in itself: that is, the conviction that we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science" (*Knowledge and Human Interests* [36], 4).

It seems to me that this view, in respect to evolution but also in respect to the nature of science as a contemporary religion, represents a sort of defeat of knowledge by an absolutism of pure methodology. As I mentioned at the outset, the categories of understanding that underlie every observation statement in the theory of evolution arise from human consciousness, and as such cannot be distinguished by the theory from other transient survival devices: its explanative method, from first to last, is necessarily only another survival mechanism that has evolved in the animal kingdom. By its own measure, it is not necessary that it be true, but only necessary that it be powerful in the struggle

for survival. Presumably, any other theory—even if illusory—that had better implications for survival could displace evolution as a mode of explanation. Or perhaps the theory itself is an illusion.

These things went through my mind at the university during my "logic of scientific explanation" days. They made me realize that my faith in scientism and evolutionism had something magical as its basis, the magic of an influential interpretation supported by a vast human enterprise. I do not propose that science should seriously try to comprehend itself, which it is not equipped to do anyway, but I have come to think that, for the sake of its consumers, it might have the epistemological modesty to "get back" from its current scientistic pretensions to its true nature, as one area of human interpretation among others. From being the "grand balance scale" on which one may weigh and judge the "reality" of all matters, large and small—subsuming "the concept of God," for example, under the study of religions, religions under anthropology, anthropology under human behavioral institutions, human behavioral institutions under evolutionary biology, evolutionary biology under organic chemistry, organic chemistry (ultimately) under cosmology, cosmology under chaos theory, and so on—I have hopes that science will someday get back to its true role, the production of technically exploitable knowledge for human life. That is, from pretensions to *'ilm* or knowledge, to its true role as *fann* or technique.

In view of the above considerations of its coherence, logicality, applicability, and adequacy, the theory of the evolution of man from lower forms does not seem to show enough scientific rigor to raise it from being merely an influential interpretation. To show evolution's *adequacy* for everything it is trying to explain would be to give valid grounds to generalize it to man. In this respect, it is a little like Sigmund Freud's work on dreams, in which he describes examples of dreams that are wish fulfillments, and then says, "When the work of interpretation has been completed the dream may be recognized as the fulfillment of a wish" (*Interpretation of Dreams* [31], 102), urging that *all* dreams are wish fulfillments. We wait to be convinced.

Summary of Islamic Conclusions

Allah alone is Master of Existence. He alone causes all that is to be and not to be. Causes are without effect in themselves, but rather both cause and effect are created by Him. The causes and the effects of all processes, including those through which plant and animal species are individuated, are His work alone. To ascribe efficacy to anything but His action, whether believing that causes (a) bring about effects in and of themselves; or (b) bring about effects in and of themselves through a capacity Allah has placed in them, is to ascribe associates to Allah (shirk). Such beliefs seem to be entailed in the literal understanding of "natural selection" and "random mutation," and other evolutionary concepts, unless we understand these processes as *figurative* causes, while realizing that Allah alone is the agent. This is apart from the consideration of whether they are true or not.

As for the claim that man has evolved from a nonhuman species, this is unbelief (kufr) no matter if we ascribe the process to Allah or to "nature," because it negates the truth of Adam's special creation that Allah has revealed in the Koran. Man is of special origin, attested to not only by revelation, but also by the divine secret within him, the capacity for *ma'rifa* or 'knowledge of the Divine' that he alone of all things possesses. By his God-given nature, man stands before a door opening onto infinitude that no other creature in the universe can aspire to. Man is something else.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

SUFFERING

ANY who suffer trials in their life find doubts arise in their hearts about Allah's wisdom. A letter reached me about a young Muslim woman in London afflicted with chronic illness after having good health, saying she had become discouraged with religion, and wondered "Why does Allah allow suffering and evil; and what *is* evil?"

Allah does whatever He wills, exalted in His perfection, and whoever turns his whole being to Allah in submission, as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) had submission, Allah aids with patience, understanding, and triumph. As Allah said to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) when he was threatened by idolaters, "Does Allah not suffice to protect His true servant? While they try to frighten you with those beneath Him: And whomever Allah lets stray has no one to guide him" (Koran 39:36).

The force of the above question, if we parse it logically, contains several premises:

1. God is almighty.

2. God is just and good.

3. Someone just and good would not allow suffering and evil if he could prevent them, yet both exist in the world.

4. Therefore God is either not almighty, or else not just and good.

Conclusion (4) is invalid not only because premise (3) is flawed

in ways we shall discuss below, and countered by many examples in our experience, but more importantly because the real answer lies in the absolute perfection of Allah. Suffering and evil we experience. Their significance lies not in making charges against God, but rather in liberation from them by attaining to limitless felicity with Him. It is not to be attained merely by Iman or 'knowing about Allah,' but by the *'amal* or 'practice' appropriate to His divine autonomy, majesty, and beauty; namely *servanthood* ('ubudiyya). For where there is true knowledge of the Master, there is love; and where there is love, there is devoted service. As Abul Hasan al-Shadhili said: "Love is the basis for being given understanding. Whoever loves Allah understands from Him everything."

Servanthood

Servanthood to Allah discloses to the servant his own larger context. The more he ascends in closeness to the Divine, the more his horizons recede and the farther he sees. Something comes to abide in a servant's heart, by directing it towards Allah in work after work, year after year, until he becomes Allah's, and Allah in a sense his. This relation is probably as unique for each of the awliya as the uniqueness of Allah Himself. It discloses to each, in his own measure, the wisdom and mercy of Allah in the interaction between servant and world. The way of those close to Allah lies not merely in realizing that the world is ordered by the theophany of Allah's names, but in seeing therein the divine perfection. "Say: 'Are the blind and the sighted equal?'" (Koran 6:50).

The Divine Names

Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman taught us that the divine names *vie* over existent things to manifest their implications in them. Consider the example of a young man from a good family, who falls in with bad company and drifts into their way of seeing and doing things, under the influence of the name *al-Khafid*, the Lowerer, and finally *al-Mudhill*, the Abaser, until the day comes when he can sink no lower and proves too disgusting for even himself to accept. The name *al-Tawwab* or Relenter deploys, he remembers how he

was, sees what he has become, and finds himself ashamed before his Maker, to whom he repents. The days and weeks see him improve, under the implications of *al-Rafi'*, He Who Raises. He seeks better company, unplugs from the bad old ways, and passes into the sphere of *al-Wadud*, the Solicitous and Tender, to *al-Karim*, the All-generous, and so forth. The interactions of the names and their determinations are complex and interpenetrative. The name *al-Musawwir*, for example, the Bestower of Forms, the Fashioner, the Ingrainer, the Organizer, manifests its implications in all existents; while *al-Warith*, the Inheritor, remains after the implications of the former have been lifted from a particular existent and it has been annihilated, effaced, and dispersed. The name *al-Muqaddim*, the Advancer, makes one existent precede another, in works, in rank, in time of appearance; while *al-Mu'akhkhir*, the Delayer, the Demoter, postpones existents and events until after others, keeps them back, or lowers them. The name *al-Wahhab*, the Liberal, the Bountiful, the Giver, dispenses His bounties to the deserving perpetually, freely, and for nothing in return; while *al-Mani'*, the Preventer, stops, denies, checks, and prevents attacks. The name *al-Nafi'*, the Benefiter, promotes and helps whomsoever He wills; while *al-Darr*, the Afflicter, damages and harms whomever He wills. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: "Verily, Allah has ninety-nine names. Whoever comprehends all of them shall enter paradise" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 6.116: 3817. s). The believer, the saint, and the *'arif* or knower of Allah directly and experientially—each knows Allah in His manifestations and determinations according to his own illumination and consciousness of the Divine.

The point here for our question is that the perfection of this world and the next lies in the *totality* of the myriad interpenetrative and interconnected modes and implications of these names. For each particular existent's "perfection" is only relative to *others*, who to that extent must be subject to some privation, whether experienced as pain, evil, or suffering. A "good job" for example, only exists in contradistinction to the less rewarding ways in which others will necessarily have to earn a living for the comparison to be meaningful. Moreover, there is a *complementarity*

in the very terms in which such particulars are construed. Thus triumph has no meaning without the possibility of ruin, friendship without the possibility of enmity, peace without war, health without disease, safety without peril, might without abasement, life without death.

So privation and evil exist in order to elucidate their opposite, human felicity and perfection; not as an "absolute standard" to measure the Divine, which rather in its completeness and totality comprehends *them*. Servanthood means accepting that such limitary concepts pertain to man, not God. Imam Juwayni, Ghazali's mentor in tenets of faith, expressed this by saying, "There is neither good nor evil in the actions of Allah Most Blessed and Exalted in respect to His divinity, for all actions are equal in respect to Him; while their levels only differ in respect to created servants" (*al-'Aqida al-Nidhamiyya* [63], 35–36).

This supreme sovereignty of Allah is the reason why the question of suffering, if earnestly discussed by thinkers of other faiths, has little real relevance for Muslims. The ethos of *Islam* or 'submission to Allah' does not reduce the order of created being in all its complexity to pleasure or pain, joy or suffering, good or evil, for these refer to created individuals. It instead acknowledges that the universe is a larger context, a theater, an examination room, for human actions to mirror the degrees, shades, and nuances of the Creator's love or wrath. The theophany of Allah's love is in human *tawfiq* or 'divinely given success' in obeying Him. The theophany of His wrath is in human *khidhlan* or the 'divine forsaking' of a servant to his own pride and folly. There is no mystery as to which is which, because Allah has sent us messengers to make success plain, given us the capacity with which to understand it, and a life and death in which to realize it.

Meaning in Context

The significance of existent things, of our lives and our deaths, lies in the universe of actions they make possible. It is probably no coincidence that the great themes of Western literature, particularly since the rise of atheism among intellectuals in the later nineteenth century, have tended to coalesce into virtually a single

theme: the alienation of man before his own meaninglessness. This is something unimaginable for a servant of Allah, except pathologically, in those far from God. For a servant is only meaningless outside of the context in which he exists: what he at bottom *is*, namely, his Master's, "who has created death and life to try you, as to which of you shall prove better in works" (Koran 67:2). The most tremendous of personal realities each of us faces, life and death themselves, are a test for something beyond them.

The larger picture tells a great deal. Stand for a moment in your mind's eye in the hallway of an institutional building, looking into one of the rooms through its open door. It is presently occupied by a group of young adults each sitting at a school desk, writing on a sheaf of papers, occasionally glancing up at the wall clock, but not looking or talking to one another. They are writing as fast as they can. Yet this is but a superficial impression, incomprehensible to someone who has never heard of students sitting an examination. The reality of it lies in the larger setting around it. We are at a college of medicine, at a university, at the end of the semester. The reality of this in turn lies in the role of universities in general, the profession of practicing medicine in the larger societal and historical context in which the college has its being, and a world economy that has focused the salaried energies of many human beings upon the enterprise on which the students in the room wish to embark.

Just now, one of them curls the fingers of her left hand around her right wrist and works it back and forth for a moment before she continues writing. She has writer's cramp, but knows it will be gone after the examination, like the coffee she has been drinking in excess for the previous week, the late hours she spent up studying with her classmates last night, and the stress hormones now coursing through her veins. What sense can possibly be made of the pains she is taking, until we understand that she intends to become a physician?

People are of two categories with respect to the meaning of such a phenomenon, and indeed of anything else in the universe: those who realize its significance, and those who do not. "Say: Are those who know equal with those who do not know?" (Koran

39:9). On the one hand, the *kafir*, lexically denoting both a denier or 'unbeliever,' and not tangentially, an *ingrate*, literally "one who is covered over"—by his own selfishness and willfulness—regards *things* as primary, the very substance of the reality and permanence of the world. Conversely, *actions* are ephemeral for him, in themselves vanishing, except as a means to *more* things, be they material, such as wealth, clothes, or property—or immaterial, such as fame, prestige, or power. For the kafir, where any aspiration exists beyond merely maximizing happiness and pleasure or avoiding sorrow and pain, the meaning of life is often no more than to augment the ego by "amounting to something." As a bumper sticker read: "He who has the most toys when he dies wins."

For the *mu'min* or believer, on the other hand, someone who has lifted his gaze to infinity, the opposite view obtains. For him, actions, specifically those which are for God alone, are all that is permanent of this world, while things are ephemeral. "Everything is perishing," its Creator declares, "but His everlasting countenance" (Koran 28:88)—*countenance* being an Arabic metaphor for what is most distinctive of someone, the person himself; here, the Being of Allah, and by extension what is done purely and solely *for* Him and no one else.

The cosmos, in macrocosm and microcosm, the infinity of sapience and sentience, of human experience within and without—exists to convey and denote the Oneness (tawhid) of the Divine. "We shall without fail show them Our signs in all of the far-flung directions, and in their very selves, until it becomes utterly plain to them that it [this revelation] is the Truth" (Koran 41:53). The meaning of things thus lies outside of things, just as the meaning of a symbol lies beyond itself, in what it signifies.

The Wisdom of Suffering and Evil

The Creator is the context and meaning of creation, so He cannot be comprehended, let alone judged by it. To do so is to commit the logical fallacy of false analogy. Charges against God fail not only because of this miscomparison to the human frame of reference, but because premise (3) of the above inference, "Some-

one just and good would not allow suffering and evil if he could prevent them," is contradicted by many examples of Allah's wisdom, justice, and goodness that entail suffering and evil, of which we can consider a few:

The Next World

Just as the mathematical value of one over infinity approaches zero, so too the time one spends in this world pales to insignificance before eternity, where in the next world, each of us will realize that in this world, "naught did you abide, but the merest moment" (Koran 23:114). Allah has imbedded the story of each particular human being, the creative theophany of the divine name *al-Rahman* or 'the Most Merciful' through manifesting contingent being, within the larger context of forever, the special theophany of *al-Rahim* or 'the All-compassionate,' which shall be most fully and absolutely manifest only in paradise to those who were His devoted servants in this world. The eternity of the afterlife furnishes the true measure and context of the transitory sufferings of this life.

Rumi alludes to this "global answer" to suffering in his parable of a young tree in the midst of the harsh, leafless winter, shivering and thinking to itself about the misery of the biting wind and cold, unable to comprehend why God should do such a thing to it. The answer finally comes in the form of the warm and verdant springtime. In the trajectory of the believer's life and death, when spring comes, it lasts forever.

The significance of joys and sufferings in this world dwindles to nothing before the next not only quantitatively because of its eternity, but qualitatively because of its intensity. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said:

> The person who had the most pleasing life in this world, of any of the people of hell, will be summoned on Resurrection Day and plunged utterly into the hellfire, then asked, "O human being, have you ever beheld any good at all; have you ever felt a single joy?" and he will say, "No by God, my Lord." And the most miserable sufferer in this world, of any of the people of paradise, will be summoned and utterly

> plunged into paradise, then asked, "O human being, have you ever seen any evil at all; have you ever experienced a single misery?" and he will say, "No by God, my Lord: I have never seen any evil or suffered a single misery" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2162: 2807. S).

They will not be lying, but rather what their oaths mean is that nothing in this world can even be called "joy" or "misery" compared with those of the next.

Joy and Suffering as Signs

Yet the joys and sufferings of this world, while they pale in the face of eternity, powerfully evoke in human hearts the realities of paradise and hell. Abu 'Ali al-Rudhabari said, "What He has manifested of His blessings indicates what He conceals of His largesse." Even the experience of those with *ma'rifa* of the Divine in this world is but a foretaste of the beatific vision of Allah in the next. For its part, disease is a harrowing ordeal, especially psychologically, since most of us tend to identify closely with our bodies. Yet through its pain and travail we come to understand how little we could bear endless suffering, teaching us to implore Allah to shield us from the hellfire, thus serving as a means of our deliverance. As Ibn 'Ata Illah has said, "Whenever He loosens your tongue with a request, know that He wants to give to you" (*al-Hikam* [49], 37: 102).

Central to worship is imploring the Worshipped. "Say, 'What should my Lord care about you if not for your prayers?'" (Koran 25:77). Unlike relatives, friends, and others, Allah loves to be asked, and dislikes not to be. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Truly, supplication is what worship is." Then he recited, "And your Lord has said: 'Call on Me and I will answer you: Verily those too proud to worship Me are soon to enter hell abased'" [40:60] (*Ahmad* [52], 4.271: 18386. S). Too, as Benjamin Franklin had Poor Richard observe in his *Almanac*, "Danger is sauce for prayers." If not for the problems, fears, and pain man faces, he would remain turned away from the door of the divine generosity, and miss an enormous share of worship that benefits him in this world and the next.

Triumph

Though well able to do so, Allah did not create mankind in paradise. Rather, He willed to consummate the perfect and endless bliss of those who reach it with the knowledge that by His grace, they have *triumphed* over all suffering, limitation, and evil for all time. "Allah solemnly promises believers, men and women, luxuriant groves of paradise beneath which rivers flow, abiding therein; and surpassing fine dwellings in lush groves of Eden: And the merest of the supreme pleasure of Allah is far yet greater. That is the tremendous triumph" (Koran 9:72). He could have created all souls on a peaceful shoreline as clams, contentedly filter-feeding from an endless sea. But to do so would be to deny them the challenge, purging, and triumph which befit the distinctively human nature with which He has endowed them.

Human Choice

Much of the suffering and evil in this world comes of man's inhumanity to man, which Allah does not accept, but punishes, sometimes in this world and sometimes in the next. Man has no excuse for this, having been sent messengers to teach him how to behave. But man's gift of being able to decide and choose for himself how to treat his fellow man, for good or evil, is his *freedom*, a capacity Allah in His wisdom has created in each of us.

Allah has raised the stakes of human existence at one and the same time to the highest possible worth and the most dreadful peril by the fact of Judgement Day, with its lasting consequences. Though man's life and works are finite, their consequences are infinite because man's determination, once he has made up his mind, is how he intends to act *forever* if he could. The hardened atheist who dismisses God as a mindless superstition does not intend to ever believe or change, so when he dies, he is requited in the measure of his intention, forever, out of Allah's justice. Likewise, the believer who loves Allah and acts accordingly does not intend to ever change, so when he dies, he too is requited in the measure of his intention, forever, out of Allah's mercy.

Eternal hellfire is a harrowing chastisement; but "forewarned is forearmed," and after revelation, hell is but what its inhabitants

have chosen for themselves: "Read your book, your own self suffices today as a knowing reckoner against you" (Koran 17:14). The existential threat of the hellfire has stopped many an iniquitous wrong in this world from being inflicted upon others, though I have never heard of an intellectual discussion of ethics that did. Hell is a peril, but one that is a *mercy* for whoever makes sensible choices. Like the endless happiness of paradise, its effect is to exalt the worth of every moment of human life in this world.

Sheikh 'Abd al-Wakil used to say that fear and hope were the two wings of the believer, without which he could not ascend. Both evoke from him supplication, and Allah wants to be supplicated. Both, too, are obligatory. Imam Taqi al-Din al-Subki says:

> Fear is obligatory: Allah Most High says, "Fear you Me, if you be true believers" [Koran 3:175], and He Most High says, "So let none of you fear men, but fear you Me" [5:44]. And hope is obligatory, because it is the opposite of despair, and despair is haram: Allah Most High says, "Verily none despairs of the relief sent by Allah but people of the unbelievers" [12:87], and He Most High says, "And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord but those utterly astray?" [15:56] (*Fatawa al-Subki* [95], 2.556).

In the Sufi path, fear and hope are imperative for the traveller from the first. The possibilities of both suffering and relief from it are integral to the ascending stages of the dhikr, in which fear and hope are transmuted first into awe (hayba) and intimate love (uns), then rigor (jalal) and beauty (jamal), and finally extinction and subsistence in the Majestic (al-Jalil) and the Beauteous (al-Jamil) Himself. Fear and hope, in these successive stages, remain the two wings of the traveller, for those most in love with the Beloved remain the most fearful of offending Him and being expelled from His presence. As Abu Madyan said, "Presence with Him is paradise, and absence from Him is hell." Punishment and suffering remain a spur on the way of spiritual attainment, even at its highest degrees, until the traveller has both feet in paradise, and can see for himself the triumph of the transformations Allah has thereby wrought.

Punishment for Sin

Much of the suffering man experiences is requital for disobedience. Allah says, "Whatever misfortune befalls you is for what your own hands have earned" (Koran 42:30)—which is the general rule, to which some of the things we are examining are exceptions. Scholars affirm that every ruling of Sacred Law has been revealed for our benefit, not Allah's. The effects of right and wrong are far more crucial in the next world, but as the above verse makes plain, sins are also at least sometimes punished in this. For those Allah loves, punishment turns them back to the path of tawfiq and obedience. For those with whom Allah is ill-pleased, disobedience is punished by their committing other acts of disobedience. As Muzayyin said, "One sin following another is punishment for the first sin, and one good deed after another is reward for the first good deed."

Among the many sins manifestly punished in this world before the next are pride, ill-treatment of parents, and oppressing others. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Beware the prayer of the oppressed, for there is no veil between it and Allah" (*Bukhari* [17], 3.169–70: 2448. s).

Negligence also of our stewardship of the natural order is punished by a world in which we cannot eat, drink, or breathe without imbibing our own befoulment. "Blighted corruption has appeared on land and sea for what men's own hands have earned; That He may make them taste something of what they have wrought, that haply they may turn back" (Koran 30:41).

The furthest reach of punishment for the wicked, but felicity for the good, is the extinction of most of mankind by global disaster. It happens when men think they know everything, but will not know God. "Until, when the earth has taken its full adornment and is decked out surpassing fair, and its folk believe it entirely at their command, Our judgement reaches it, by night or by day, and We make it mown-down stubble as though it had flourished not but yesterday" (Koran 10:24). It happened before in the time of the prophet Noah (upon whom be peace). No one can understand it but those who read the Koran. It is a triumph

for those who hold their faith to the end, or even embrace faith by reason of it, but a punishment for all others. With drought, famine, plagues, and wars, Allah may nevertheless make it a time of tremendous baraka and subtly hidden kindness (lutf khafi) to those He loves. The destruction wrought upon Muslims by the Mongol Horde, which decimated populations like an atom bomb, harrowed the religious soil of the time and brought forth some of the greatest awliya who ever walked the earth. Such events make sincerity easy. Also, by the extinction of most of humanity, who would otherwise be iniquitous and atheists, billions of the unborn will be saved from the hellfire by the mercy of God, and the believers who remain, if any, may teach survivors the truth before the Last Day.

The Example of the Patient

The innocent are sometimes tried with suffering in order to manifest their spiritual rank or inspire others by their example. The prophets, for example (upon whom be blessings and peace), were exemplars to mankind, and their suffering was greater than anyone else's—not to punish or purify them, for they were already without blemish, but in order to teach mankind patience and fortitude. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) was asked, "Who amongst mankind bears the most affliction?" and he replied: "The prophets, then those most like them, then those next most like them. A man is tried in the measure of his religion: if his religion is firm, his trial is great; while if there is flimsiness in his religion, he is tried according to his religion. Tribulation remains with the servant until it leaves him walking upon the earth without a single mistake" (*Tirmidhi* [103], 4.406: 2561. S). Yet this probably clarifies the exception, which is tribulation in the lives of the righteous, rather than the general rule, which is their being preserved from it—for it is a sunna to ask Allah to be free of affliction. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) told Abu Bakr, "Ask Allah for well-being (mu'afah), for no one was ever given anything, after certitude, that was better than well-being" (*Ahmad* [52], 1.3: 5. S).

The Suffering of Others

The sufferings of the innocent, such as from natural disasters, disease, or the inhumanity of others, are temporary, and shall be a source of triumph in the next life, the infinite sphere of Allah's name *al-Rahim*, the All-compassionate. Children who die find eternal bliss.

In this world, the sufferings of the innocent are equally a test for onlookers, who are not innocent if they can do something to alleviate them. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "The believer is not someone who spends the night while his neighbor is hungry" (*al-Mustadrak* [38], 4.167. S). Scholars of Sacred Law mention that while some duties in Islam are of *defined* amount, such as the five daily prayers, fasting the month of Ramadan, the hajj once in a lifetime—others are equally obligatory, but of an *undefined* amount, such as cooperating with one another in good works, feeding the hungry, helping the distressed, or providing disaster relief. Someone who can help a sufferer by spending his money, his time, his influence, his advice, or if nothing else, his prayers, must. From Allah's wisdom, this too is a trial of man "with the bad and good as a momentous test" (Koran 21:35).

Heeding Others' Destruction

Man lives in a group, thinks and speaks in words and symbols bequeathed him by a group, and benefits from the larger polity of mankind, both the community of individuals and nations found today, and the successive generations who have gone before and left behind them the enrichment of culture and civilization down to our times. We are educated not only by our own lives, but those of others, be they individuals, groups, or entire peoples. The refining and educating of *Rabb al-'Alamin*, Uplifter of All Worlds of Beings, comprehends both individuals and groups. Allah teaches us by the object lesson of previous civilizations whom He warned by sending them guidance, and who scoffed, and who met with destruction, that however great as we may feel ourselves to be, whether as a nation, as makers of war, as a community of scientific explanation, as a civilization—we may yet understand that "Who is mightier than we in strength?" (Koran

41:15) were the famous last words of everyone who said them. "Or could they not see that Allah, who created them, was truly mightier than they in strength?" (Koran 41:15). Humility when confronted with omnipotence is mere realism, "yet man is of all things the most contentious" (Koran 18:54), and without the object lesson of previous peoples, most men would never understand it. There is no injustice in this, for "when Allah sends down a chastisement upon a people, the chastisement strikes whoever is among them; then they are raised up, each according to his own works" (*Bukhari* [17], 9.71: 8108. S). The example of others whose pride and folly brought about their destruction is a powerful lesson not to follow their path, and hence a felicity and mercy for those willing to learn.

The Divine Bounty

The sufferings experienced by good people in this world are from the bounty of Allah, who benefits them thereby. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "No Muslim suffers debility, illness, worry, sorrow, vexation, or gloom—even a thorn that pricks him—without Allah thereby expiating some of his misdeeds" (*Bukhari* [17], 7.148–49: 5642. S). He once said (Allah bless him and give him peace) of a Muslim's satisfaction with destiny in good times and bad: "A believer is like budding grain: whichever way the wind blows, it sways, and when the wind stops, it straightens upright: he bends with affliction. And a wicked man is like a massive cedar, standing aloft until Allah breaks it asunder when He wills" (ibid., 5644. S). The Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) also said, "Whomever Allah wills good for He afflicts somewhat" (ibid., 5645. S)—that is, because "Allah loves the steadfast" (Koran 3:146). For these reasons, the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) observed: "How wondrous is the state of the believer, for all that happens to him is good. If good befalls him, he shows gratitude, and it is best for him. And if ill befalls him, he shows patience, and it is best for him" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2295: 2999. S).

This bounty is as often found in groups as in individuals. In the natural world, consciousness of pain, if unpleasant to bear at

an individual level, is evolutionarily beneficial and adaptive for individuals who possess it to teach them what to avoid. If the individual suffers to death, it prospers the species as a whole through natural selection. In the succession of nations and civilizations, there is a cultural selection of usages, institutions, and inventions—writing, for example—that are more beneficial and useful in at least some ways than prior ones. "And as for what benefits people, it remains in the earth" (Koran 13:17). When the innocent are abused and suffer, laws come into being. When maladies afflict them, new medicines are developed. Of the species which interact with their environment in complex ways, nature offers few examples that cannot experience pain. It is simply too advantageous.

Hardiness Through Change

Hardiness normally increases through change and adversity. Sidi 'Ali al-Jamal, the sheikh of Mawlay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi, wrote in his *Meaning of Man:*

> Realize too that the wisdom [*hikma*, here, meaning the *cause* that makes things work the way they do] that underlies all beings also underlies man; namely change. Allah has produced the well-being and preservation of man through changes; and Allah has produced the detriment and destruction of man through his remaining in one condition rather than another . . . So much so, that if he persists long enough in his fixity and remains with it, he atrophies and finally perishes. Whenever he says, "This is appropriate," or "This is inappropriate," he is ignorant of the wisdom of Allah, both in himself and others. This insight sums up the health of bodies, health of souls, and health of all beings. And so too it is with increase: there is none except through change. Or decrease: there is none except through lack of change—whether in all beings or in man (*Ma'ani al-insan* [60], 181–82).

Without sleep as well as wakefulness, hunger as well as satiation, poverty as well as riches, sadness as well as joy, pain as well

as relief, man would not thrive in this world. Stasis means atrophy and death.

This is equally manifest in the balance between natural species, whose interests are inextricably intertwined by feeding, parasitism, symbiosis, and perhaps most strikingly, predation. On Isle Royale, for example, a forty-five-mile-long wilderness sanctuary separated by fourteen miles of open water of Lake Superior from the coast of Ontario, there were no moose until 1908, when a number of them swam across the channel to escape wolves on the mainland. By 1915, their numbers had increased to two hundred. The population, unhindered by natural enemies, kept steadily increasing until 1930, when they had eaten up so much of the vegetation on the island that they were starving in droves, emaciated and diseased. The eight hundred or so moose continued, miserably famished and ill, until the winter of 1948–49, when a pack of some twenty timber wolves came across the ice and began to prey on the herd. They were soon reduced to some six hundred, or thirty moose to each wolf, which is the natural balance between the two species in the wild. The outward ferocity of the wolves bringing down the individual moose and eating them, the inevitable fear and blood and suffering of the prey at the fangs of the predator, proved to be a divine mercy resulting in the recovery of the species as a whole on the isle. Within a few years, the herd was better fed and healthier than any time in the previous half century it had lived there (*Seven Mysteries* [73], 474–75).

Spiritual Growth

The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Patience is a surpassing light" (*Muslim* [74], 1.203: 223. S), and some Sufis, including the *Malamatiyya* or 'followers of the path of blame,' have considered psychic pain, particularly from the derision, censure, and scorn of others, a means of pruning away spiritual insincerity. The sheikhs of this school, Hamdun of Nishapur and others, noticed that the hearts of most of us pay an inordinate amount of attention to what others think, and that love of others' regard is often a reason for insincerity with Allah. They found

that breaking the ordinary habits of the mind, and the resultant helplessness and dismay at being left without anyone or anything to help—except Allah—was a means for opening up a door between one and the Divine. Mawlay al-'Arabi al-Darqawi methodically used this to precipitate the realization in his disciples that there was no recourse from Allah except to Him. When disciples took him as their sheikh, he had them give away everything they owned, then go door-to-door begging, particularly in neighborhoods where they were well known and would be certain to meet with insult and humiliation. It was very effective in breaking egos, and Darqawi filled North Africa with awliya and *'arifin*. Ibn 'Ata Illah says, "Nothing pleads more for you than utter need; nor is anything swifter in bringing divine gifts than humiliation and want" (*al-Hikam* [49], 43: 129). I gained an insight into this when I moved to Jordan in 1980. I had been fishing at sea for some years, and was big, and thought I was tough—until several years of chronic liver disease, never precisely identified, made me too weak to walk much farther than fifty yards without exhaustion. Few things ever benefited me more than this dismal period, from which I finally realized that Allah alone was in control, "while man was truly created weak" (Koran 4:28). Clearly, the darkest hour which precedes the dawn is so often the rule, that Abul Hasan al-Shadhili was to say, "By Allah, I have not seen triumph except in humiliation."

Tests from Allah

Sufferings are a spiritual trial from Allah, who says, "We try you all with the bad and good as a momentous test; and unto Us shall you be returned" (Koran 21:35). Doubts about the mercy of Allah, despair at fate, the *waswasa* of the Devil in implanting the very question we are treating here in the heart and obscuring the answer—all these sufferings are a test from Allah. Sufis mention that people are of four categories in such trials:

1. If one proves patient with the test and lives it out, it means that one is passing it. Allah says: "Those patient with adversity shall but fully be requited their wage without reckoning" (Koran 39:10).

2. If one benefits from the test by learning, changing, and gaining experience that will protect one from the like of it in the future, this is characteristic of the dervish, whose way depends on benefiting from both his good and his evil. He benefits from his good by thanking Allah for it and not turning to look at it, and he benefits from his evil by heartbrokenness, repentance, and never returning to it again. He benefits as well from the evil of others by changing it with his tongue, his hand, or by a prayer in his heart; or if unable to change it, he benefits by realizing that it is evil, which is rewarded by Allah as faith in what the prophets (upon whom be peace) have taught. Indeed, he cannot *not* benefit as long as he is travelling the way.

3. If one is well contented with Allah for honoring one with tribulation, and aspires to win His good pleasure through it, then the test is a spiritual increase, and means one is already on an exalted footing, for trials are seldom except in what one holds dearest, and are proportionately harder for those of higher rank. Shibli used to say, "Allah's raising the spiritual degrees of His servants is commensurate with their distress: had He poured upon the awliya an ant's weight of what He has poured upon the prophets, they would have melted away and been cut off."

4. Finally, if one is bitter about the test and resentful over Allah's destining it, it means that one is failing, unless one turns one's back on the Devil and the self, and sincerely repents, and returns to one of the other categories.

Knowing This World

Our Maker has warned man against attaching his heart to this world, through His prophets (upon whom be blessings and peace) in the revelations of all previous ages and peoples. He says, "And the paltry life of this world is naught but a divertment and frivolity; and verily the Final Abode, truly it alone is the life that is vibrantly alive, if they only knew" (Koran 29:64). 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar said, "The Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) took me by the shoulders and said, 'Be in this world as though you were a stranger, or a traveller going down the road'" (*Bukhari* [17], 8.110: 6416. S).

Setting one's hopes upon something that must vanish is a lack of realism. This world has purposely been designed by its Creator to fall short of human expectations. This is from the *lutf* or 'all-subtle loving-kindness' of *al-Latif*, the 'All-knowing and All-solicitous' towards His servants. If the disappointment and sordidness of this world were less plain, people would forget the infinite beauty of the Beloved, and the permanent abode of His generosity. "He knew you would not take mere advice, so He let you taste its flavor to make it easier for you to give up" (*al-Hikam* [49], 62: 230).

Pain often comes from other people, as Allah says, "And some of you We have made a mighty tribulation to others: Will you then prove patient?" (Koran 25:20). Allah tries the poor person by seeing the rich person and wondering why he is not like him, tries the ill by seeing the well, tries the lowly by seeing the noble, tries wives with husbands, and husbands with wives, tries parents with children, and children with parents, tries teachers with students who go bad. Tests teach the tested that what they really want is not found in the hands of other people, but only in Allah's. "He has only made vexation appear at their hands so that you might not be satisfied with them. He wants to annoy you from everything, so that you may not be occupied from Him by anything" (*al-Hikam* [49], 63: 235). This is the point of all our pain and disappointment, whether from ourselves or others: that it be a means to Allah. As Sheikh al-Buzidi said, "Everything you want is found in the Being of Allah."

At the personal level, pain and loss teach man to thank God for his blessings. Ibn 'Ata Illah says, "Whoever does not appreciate the value of blessings by having them, will appreciate it by losing them" (*al-Hikam* [49], 56: 199), and said, "Whoever is unthankful for blessings has made himself liable to lose them, while whoever shows gratitude for them has fastened them with their true tethers" (ibid., 29: 64). It is related that the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) once "asked his household for something to eat with his bread, and they said, 'We have nothing but vinegar.' He asked for some and started having it with it, saying, 'What a splendid sauce is vinegar! What a splendid sauce

vinegar is!'" (*Muslim* [74], 3.1622: 2052. 8)—teaching us not only to show graciousness and tact in all circumstances, but also the sunna of exalting even the least blessings. This was his inevitable practice, not out of naïveté or ignorance of greater blessings, but because every minor blessing, if we think about it, presupposes, in order to be enjoyed, a multitude of major blessings such as health, life, security, time, and liberty; as well as freedom from pain, oppression, injury, and a thousand other misfortunes. That is, from a more concrete viewpoint, there are no *minor* blessings. Without privation we would not realize our blessings, which makes it itself a blessing.

Ma'rifa

By privation and want, Allah perfects the *'arif*'s experiential knowledge of the Divine. For knowing the One entails not only knowing Him in His entity (dhat), but in His names and attributes, in His rulings which determine the relations between existent things, and in His actions which encompass everything in this world.

The *ma'rifa* of the Sufis is at the upper limit of a continuum of Iman or faith, and like it, is disparate in degree among those it is given to. Abul Hasan al-Shadhili in his Grand Litany used to pray for "vast gnosis" (ma'rifa wasi'a), not to suggest that it is ever anything but vast, but to acknowledge the gulf between human knowledge, however sublime, and Allah's own perfect knowledge of Himself. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman too used to say, with Ibn al-'Arabi, that "no one knows God but God." Yet Abul Hasan's asking for "vast knowledge" equally directs others to expand their *ma'rifa*. One of the most telling means of doing so is firmness in beholding the Divine at the moment of trial. Ibn 'Ajiba enjoins this by saying, "As for him who knows [Allah] in the divine beauty, but not in the divine rigor and majesty, or [knows Him] when given to, but not when withheld from, or in triumph but not in humiliation, in health but not in illness, in well-being but not affliction, in wealth but not poverty, in ease but not hardship—such a person is a great liar" (*Iqadh al-himam* [47], 2.241).

The last words are perhaps something of a hyperbole, for

when Allah tests someone, even a servant who has *ma'rifa*, it will not infrequently push him to the very limit of his capacity. Otherwise it would not be a test. In Dr. Marcel Carret's ministrations to Sheikh al-'Alawi as he lay in the extremity of dying, for example, when he lost consciousness, the doctor injected him with a stimulant that brought him back from that far perimeter. The sheikh awoke with a reproof on his lips for holding him back from his Beloved. Carret wrote:

> . . . He opened his eyes, and looked at me reproachfully. "Why did you do that?" he said. "You should have let me go. There is no point in keeping me back. What is the good?"
>
> "If I am at your side," I answered, "it is because God willed it so. And if He willed it so, it was in order that I might do my duty by you as your doctor."
>
> "Very well," he said. "*In sha' Allah*" (if God wills) (*A Moslem Saint* [68], 31).

At that moment of wrenching separation after closeness, and utter physical weakness, Sheikh al-'Alawi's opacity at beholding the doctor, who was after all merely a means of effecting the divine will, was succeeded by a higher degree of recognition, expanding his knowledge of Allah. As Ibn 'Ata Illah prayed, "My Lord, I realize from the diversity of phenomenal vestiges, and the transformations of successive stages, that what You want of me is to reveal Yourself to me in everything, so that I may not be ignorant of You in anything" (*al-Munajat* [49], 82: 11).

Suffering in the Spiritual Path

Spiritual sufferings include those of murids whose *suluk* has stalled. When early in my tariqa I once complained to Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman about my occasional bouts of dispiritedness, he told me, "Allah makes spiritual expansion (bast) and dispiritedness (qabd) alternate in the human heart as night alternates with day, until Allah makes you only with Him."

Longer still are the periods of spiritual dryness that sometimes set in after the beginning of a disciple's path, as a test from Allah

of his sincerity. Anyone can be a servant when it is pleasant, but who can be one when it is not? True servanthood means *tawakkul* or reliance on Allah and continuing in one's servitude come what may. As Ibrahim al-Dusuqi said, "Whomever Allah tries, let him bear it patiently, for He has only tried him in order to exalt him, or reject him."

But when spiritual progress is held up at great length, the disciple may well face a basic obstacle such as pride, lack of contentment, or having sullied the *rub* by internalizing the culture, goals, or character of the spiritually dead. Such obstacles can remain unaddressed for years by "putting on a good face" and not returning to one's sheikh and asking him what to do about them. In such a case, the pain caused by lack of progress is a message from God to the murid that he has an attitude problem, and should consult his sheikh. A tariqa consists not only of a disciple, but also of a teacher under whose guidance the disciple accomplishes his journey. Suffering is a gift from Allah when it brings one back to the way of success, and often the harbinger of increase. "Dire needs are the feast-days of disciples" (*al-Hikam* [49], 52: 174).

Another more common spiritual suffering is alienation from God because of sin. The wisdom therein is that one repent and renew one's closeness to Allah. "How many a sin that led to humiliation and need was better than an act of worship that led to exulting and pride!" (ibid., 36: 96). In this sense the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "By Him in whose hand is my soul, if none of you sinned, Allah would do away with you and bring a people who sinned and asked Allah's forgiveness, so that He might forgive them" (*Muslim* [74], 4.2106: 2749. 8).

Submitting to God

These examples are but instances of the great divine wisdom in suffering. Most suffering teaches us detachment from all but Allah. Some, like that of the prophets and saints, inspires us with a sense of the spiritual exaltedness of the sufferer and his fortitude. Some shows us the magnitude of the divine blessing of relief after distress. All reveals to those given wisdom the immen-

sity of the divine perfection, beauty, sovereignty, and justice, "yet none remember but those clearest of mind" (Koran 2:269). Even a little wisdom shows the nullity of the idea that "someone just and good would not allow suffering and evil if he could prevent them." To even suggest it shows a profound lack of realism about human nature that could hardly be expected from someone who had lived any length of time in this world and dealt with people, let alone someone who created them.

A great part of every man's tawfiq is wisdom, of which Allah has said, "He gives wisdom to whomever He wills, and whoever is given wisdom has been given tremendous good" (Koran 2:269). Wisdom is usually taken to mean a farsighted comprehension of matters not foreseen by the less farsighted. The scholars of Islam explain it as "putting a thing where it should be," while Ghazali defines it simply as "that which was brought by the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace)." Recognizing the wisdom of Allah in everything is certainly a part of these definitions, and in it lies the key to answering the question "Why does Allah allow suffering and evil?"

Were we to ask such a question about a human being, it would be an inquiry about a motive, what *moved* him to allow such and such. But Allah is not moved by anything, for He is already perfect, not admitting of any increase in perfection such that seeking it should *move* Him to do something. Sanusi mentions in his celebrated creed that Allah's utter dissimilarity to created things obviates His "having motives, whether in actions or rulings" (*al-Sanusiyya* [13], 25). So "Why" is logically meaningless as an inquiry into Allah's *motives*, though it is meaningful as an inquiry into such aspects of His divine wisdom as our own wisdom can comprehend. But what if we cannot?

Wisdom means accepting God as God and man as man. No man can encompass more than an infinitesimal part of the knowledge of the whole, which alone would furnish the true measure of its perfection and justice. Sir Walter Scott relates that Emperor Napoleon once felt that as a world conqueror, it should not be difficult for him to master a team of spirited horses attached to a coach, though he was normally driven by a coachman. He

mounted the coachman's seat and took the whip, with Empress Josephine and others below as passengers, and set off driving the carriage, which he then overturned, suffering a severe and dangerous fall, afterwards observing, "I believe every man should confine himself to his own trade" (*Napoleon* [88], 9.238). As for the question of suffering, the only one capable of judging the perfection of God in everything is God. Man is but a part, and can know but a part. Those aspects of the divine wisdom that we do comprehend are disclosed by true servanthood ('ubudiyya). It includes *husn al-dhann bi Llah* or thinking the best of Allah. Only those without it would make up hypothetical situations, and then tax Allah with them. "Suffering in general" is such a hypostatized, abstract reality, for the suffering of a part may well entail the benefit of the whole, as do penal laws imposed by every human society upon its members for the security of all, or one of the many other aspects of wisdom we have explored. Our very experience in life teaches us "Never call anything a misfortune until you have seen the end of it." Here a Muslim says, "Allah suffices us, and is the best reliance" (Koran 3:173), which were never intended as mere words, but rather a *hal*, born of a nearness to Allah that trusts entirely in His wisdom.

If these replies to the question of suffering sound like so many heresies in the present day, it is only because of the grip on modern minds of the "humanistic fallacy," first advanced by the Greek sophist Protagoras, who said, "Man is the measure of all things: of those that are, that they are; and of those that are not, that they are not" (*History of Philosophy* [21], 1.87). In humanism, man is the measure of all knowledge, all values, and even of God. To this fundamental error, raised by the modern day from an ancient sophistry to a world ethos, revelation replies: "It may haply be that you dislike something, and it is good for you; or haply that you like something, and it is bad for you; and Allah knows, while you know not" (Koran 2:216).

Conclusions

At the outset we put the question of suffering in three premises and a conclusion:

1. God is almighty.

2. God is just and good.

3. Someone just and good would not allow suffering and evil if he could prevent them, yet both exist in the world.

4. Therefore God is either not almighty, or else not just and good.

From our knowledge of *tawhid*, the Divine Oneness and uniqueness, it is plain why conclusion (4), "Therefore God is either not almighty, or else not just and good," does not follow from the above premises; namely, because the key terms "just" and "good" in premises (2) and (3) are equivocal, so the conclusion is logically invalid. They are used in premise (2) as they apply to one order of being, that of the Divine; while in premise (3) are used *both* as they apply to the Divine and as they apply to an entirely different order of being, that of *man*. Moreover, even of man, it is not always true to say that "someone just and good would not allow suffering and evil if he could prevent them," since someone just and good might well choose the lesser of two evils, or impose temporary suffering by, say, surgery to effect a cure, or for innumerable other ethically valid reasons. Our many examples above have shown how even less the premise "someone just and good would not allow suffering and evil if he could prevent them" applies to God than to man. The autonomy of Allah, His supreme perfection unto Himself, and the fact that man is not a partner (sharik) in this perfection, entail a number of consequences:

First, we can only grasp Allah's goodness, justice, mercy, and other attributes to the degree that our all-too-human understanding can absorb the light of what He has revealed to us about them in the Koran and the sunna.

Secondly, Allah's justice is intrinsically different from human justice. "Morally accountable" means neither more nor less than "answerable to Allah." It is meaningless to ask *whether* He is just, because His judgement is what justice *is*. "He is not asked of what He does, but it is they who shall be asked" (Koran 21:23).

Third, because of the limited and fragmentary nature of our knowledge about the past, present, and future, to say nothing of

the details of the cosmos, our own motives, those of others, the parts of others' lives we cannot see, and above all *eternity*—through which alone the consequences of the present will become transparent to comprehension—suffering and evil remain at least to some degree opaque in this life. Their full knowledge, if we are realistic about the limits of our own, must be consigned to their Creator.

Fourth, because Allah is the primary reality, and the particulars imperfectly known to us derive from Him alone, His own perfection entails that from the perspective of omniscience, the world is perfect, while it only seems imperfect, evil, and filled with needless suffering from a human point of view that is limitary and incomplete. Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman used to convey to us from Sheikh al-'Alawi: "All the universe is Light, and the only thing that darkens it is the manifestation of the ego in it."

In other words, reality in its entirety, the true concrete, is the infinity of Allah and His limitless perfection. The *'arifin* or those who know Allah directly and experientially, men such as Imam Ghazali, Mawlana Rumi, Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, Abu Madyan, Sheikh al-'Alawi, and Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman (Allah be well pleased with them all), have traversed the path to Him and realized this perfection by beholding its Source, saying with 'Abd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi, "My eye at anything besides Your beauty does not gaze" (*Diwan al-haqa'iq* [77], 1.246). Their spiritual vantage-point has revealed to them the radical affirmation of everything that is from God, and they have said with one voice, as the Prophet himself (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "All the creation of Allah Mighty and Majestic is goodly" (*Ahmad* [52], 4.390: 19475. 8), or as our sheikh used to express it: "Were any of you to behold the Unseen, you would not choose anything but what actually is." For all that exists is but through Allah's consummate sovereignty: He does what He wills, and rules as He ordains. The obvious question for man is: Then why not strive to win His eternal favor and bliss, rather than His eternal wrath and punishment? Finally, from these considerations we can understand the nature of evil, and that it is inimical to man alone. Evil is rebellion against God that is not followed by repentance.

There is no injustice in this, for as Allah Most High says:

Verily those who believe and work righteous deeds, their Lord guides them, for their true faith; Beneath them shall flow rivers, in luxuriant groves of bliss. Their inspired prayer therein is "Exalted is Your glory beyond measure O Allah"; And their greeting therein is "Peace"; And the close of their prayer is ever "All praise be to Allah, Lord of All Worlds of Beings" (Koran 10:9–10).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

RESOURCES

1. Those interested in reliable knowledge of Islam based on traditional classical scholarship may find it at Qibla for the Islamic Sciences at **www.Qibla.com**

2. Those seeking to learn more about the Shadhili Order of Sufism should see **www.ShadhiliTeachings.com**

3. Those who would like to meet the author at the yearly Suhbas of the Shadhili Order in the United States, India, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Australia, England, and Egypt will find contact details at **www.Suhba.org**

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APPENDIX C

GLOSSARY

The purpose of this glossary is to define what the author means by special terms in contexts where they appear unglossed in the present volume. For greater enrichment by seeing them explained in the text, readers may refer to the subject index. Key terms are set in small capitals for readers to see as needed.

adab. Good breeding, appropriate personal refinement, proper manners, the right way of going about something.

adhan. The call summoning to group prayer.

Ahl al-Sunna. Those faithful to the way of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace): in our times by (a) following one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence in personal works, whether Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, or Hanbali; (b) believing in the eternal verities of the Koran and SUNNA, as concurred upon by the Maturidi and Ash'ari schools of 'AQIDA; (c) having love and respect for the AWLIYA; and (d) shunning the misguidance of Ahl al-BID'A, sects such as the Shiites, Qadianis, and WAHHABIS.

akhlaq. Character traits; especially gracious ones towards others.

Al al-Bayt. The descendants of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace).

alim, pl. ***ulema.*** A traditional Muslim taught by ulema in the religious sciences who practices his DIN, has memorized its important texts, worships much, and fears Allah.

'aqida. The central tenets of faith taught by Allah and His messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace) that one must believe in to be a Muslim.

'arif, pl. ***'arifin.*** A person whom Allah illuminates with MA'RIFA or direct heart-knowledge of the Divine, and ADAB with His presence, so that he worships Allah as though he sees Him.

awliya. Plural of WALI.

Axis (Qutb) of the Age. The supreme WALI of a particular time, through whom Allah aids the DIN of ISLAM, makes plain what has been unclear to the people of the time, and shows mercy to mankind.

baraka. Divinely bestowed blessedness, increase, grace, and prosperity found in a person or thing; according to texts of the Koran and HADITH, a property which Allah manifests in people, places, rain, trees, greetings, the Koran, and other things blessed and loved by Him.

basira. The mystic insight with which the 'ARIF beholds the Divine. It sees only the Increate, just as its counterpart, *basar* or eyesight, sees only the created.

bid'a. That which the ULEMA of the four schools have declared to be a reprehensible HARAM practice inaugurated in religion that contravenes the Koran, SUNNA, IJMA', or if none of these decides the question, then the opinion of the SAHABA.

Day of 'Arafa. The ninth of the Islamic month of Dhul Hijja.

dhakir. Someone who does much DHIKR.

dhikr. Lit. remembrance; the pure invocation in worship of Allah; the mention and remembrance of divine names that awaken the heart; the means by which the soul is absorbed in the reality of the Named; by extension, any act that is done for Allah alone.

din. The religion of Islam as a life-commitment.

diwan. The collected poetical works of a particular poet; or the room in a house or palace for receiving guests.

du'a. Supplication to God in prayer.

fana. Annihilation in God, a metaphor for the passing away of the ego by its possessor's absorption in the Divine and obliviousness to self. The real thing is not attainable by any human means, but only through a miraculous grace (karama) from Allah. Its result is divine preservation in outwardly keeping Allah's limits, and inwardly being with nothing besides Him.

faqih, pl. ***fuqaha.*** An ALIM with knowledge and godfearingness in answering Muslims' questions about details of Islamic jurisprudence, acquired through long practice, experience, and study.

Fatiha. The opening SURA of the Koran.

fatwa. An expert Islamic legal opinion about an ethical question.

fiqh. The knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence in its details by a FAQIH.

fitra. Good human nature, the simple and healthy moral responses of someone who is natural; the soul's primal capacity to know Allah.

ghafla. Obliviousness, heedlessness, inattention to the Divine; the opposite of DHIKR.

ghusl. Complete bathing to lift major ritual impurity resulting from childbirth, menses, or sex.

hadith. The text of an eyewitness report of something the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, did, refrained from, intended to do, or was.

hadra. A public group DHIKR with rhythm, motion, and vocal music.

hajj. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca incumbent on every able Muslim once in a lifetime.

hal. A personal mode of being; the state of a person with Allah; the personal experience of some aspect of this state; a transient religious or mystical experience.

halal. Actions which Allah has revealed are lawful, licit, and wholesome; that which deserves neither reward nor punishment in the next life; it is the initial presumption for everything except the few things that revelation has specified to be MAKRUH or HARAM.

haqiqa, pl. ***haqa'iq*** (Realities). The higher worlds and what is in them, through which the lower worlds and what is in them exist.

al-Haqq. Allah in His aspect as the Truth, the Abidingly and Intrinsically Real, the One True Being who bestows contingent existence and nonexistence on whatever He wills.

haram. Actions which Allah has revealed are unlawful, illicit, deserve punishment, and in which there is no BARAKA in this world or the next.

hawa. Sin; a stubborn whim followed by the NAFS; wrongheaded persistence in folly.

hijab. Woman's raiment covering all but her face and hands for modesty, and which does not emphasize her beauty or distinguish her from other women; metaphorically, any veil preventive from seeing something, inwardly or outwardly.

himma. Force of spiritual resolve; ambition to reach Allah; the opposite of self-delusion.

Ihsan. Doing more than the obligatory; excelling; surpassing in doing good; to worship Allah as though one sees Him; MA'RIFA.

ijaza. Written authorization of mastery to teach an Islamic subject.

ijma'. Consensus of every MUJTAHID alive in one era of history about the ruling of Allah on something, resulting in a decisive final legal judgement on it.

ijtihad. The effort of a qualified expert MUJTAHID to discover Allah's legal ruling on something.

ikhlas. Sincerity; genuineness; the opposite of hypocrisy or showing-off; that one's aim in an action be to please Allah.

'ilm. Allah's knowledge of what is; also, traditional Sacred Learning.

'ilm al-tawhid. Lit. knowledge of the Divine Oneness; a name for the traditional scholastic theology of Islam.

imam. A man who leads Muslims at prayer.

Imam. A major historical figure in the Islamic religious sciences who deserves, by consensus of the ULEMA of that discipline, to be taken as an exemplar in it and followed by Muslims.

Iman. Complete faith in Allah, His angels, His Books, His messengers, the next world, and in His destiny; that which inspires spiritual works; the heart's conviction of eternal verities that makes it untroubled by anything else.

'inaya. The special divine concern of Allah for a particular individual, event, or thing.

Islam. Lit. utter submission to Allah; the religion of God for all mankind revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace); any part of this religion.

istikhara. Prayer of two supererogatory RAK'AS followed by a supplication to be guided and helped by Allah's own choice to do or not to do something one is contemplating.

i'tibar. To contemplate something to reveal the purpose of Allah in it and take it to heart.

jalal. The immensity of the Divine Majesty, and the human experience of rigor, hardship, terror, awe, and dread through its manifestations.

jihad. Sincere effort to make the Word of Allah paramount that accords with the conditions and limits specified for it by Sacred Law; striving, struggle, military action in battle, and expending time and wealth to this end. In Sufism, to subdue the NAFS; in DHIKR, to rid the heart of thoughts and forms that distract it from the One Remembered (al-Madhkur).

kafir. Someone who denies that the Prophet Muhammad (Allah bless him and give him peace) told the truth in conveying Allah's religion to mankind.

khalwa. Spiritual retreat in solitude for a period of DHIKR under the supervision of a SHEIKH who is an authorized MURSHID.

kufr. Denial of anything definitively known to have been taught by the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) as Allah's revelation to mankind.

Latifiyya. A Sufi group DHIKR of the name of Allah "al-Latif," followed by MUDHAKARA.

madhhab. One of the four Sunni schools of Islamic jurisprudence; body of FIQH rulings derived, through the IJTIHAD of the IMAM after whom each school is named, from the knowledge taken by the SAHABA from the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). Whoever meets Allah after living according to any of them has thus followed the DIN of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) to the best of his knowledge and ability, and may expect the best from Allah.

makruh. Lit. offensive; deeds that are religiously objectionable but do not deserve punishment in the next world, though if one avoids them for the sake of Allah, one deserves merit and reward.

ma'rifa. Direct and experiential knowledge of Allah in the heart, attained rarely through pure divine favor without means, but

more commonly through taking a TARIQA and following the training of a MURSHID.

mawlid. Lit. nativity; a celebration of gratitude to Allah for sending the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) as a mercy unto the worlds, marked by singing and narratives of the circumstances surrounding his birth, as Allah Himself relates of other great prophets in the Koran.

mudhakara. Sufi teaching by a sheikh to a disciple about SULUK; such teaching read or related among Sufis for their edification.

mufti. An ALIM qualified by his intelligence, godfearingness, mastery of Islamic jurisprudence, and empirical knowledge of the matters under discussion to authoritatively answer ethical and legal questions about religion and this world.

mujahada. In Sufism, mortifying the ego, sublimating the base and wicked within oneself to become better and closer to Allah.

mujahideen. Those who strive, expend, or battle against the enemies of God.

mujtahid. An ALIM at the highest level of Islamic knowledge, who has memorized and knows the language and content of the revelation of Islam, and has the intelligence, clarity, and TAWFIQ to operationalize for Muslims the rulings of the Koran and the SUNNA in their religious and worldly matters, whether or not these be previously known or asked about.

muqaddam. The deputy authorized by a Sufi sheikh to serve the needs of disciples in a particular area.

muraqaba. Vigilance; awareness that Allah sees one; watching out for dangers before they appear; considering one's deeds and words in the light of the good pleasure of Allah before one begins them.

murid. Lit. aspirant; a disciple who submits himself to the rule of a Sufi order under a sheikh.

murshid. A man who guides others in the path of IHSAN as a sheikh; someone with a formal IJAZA in the TARIQA from his own sheikh, and the TAWFIQ from Allah to give TARBIYA.

nafs. The ego; in Sufism, the lower soul that prompts one to words and deeds unworthy of a slave of Allah.

qasida. A traditional Arabic poetic form; a Sufi poem that directs hearts to God.

qibla. The noblest of directions, which is that of the Holy Kaaba in Mecca from wherever one is.

rak'a. A single "bowing" or cycle of the motions and litany of the Muslim prayer: standing, bowing, straightening up, prostrating, sitting back, and then prostrating again.

ruh. The spirit; the soul; the subtle reality within every human being that was created to know, love, and return to Allah.

Sahaba. Those who met the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in his lifetime and died believing in his message; the highest rank of the AWLIYA.

sahih. Correct; in HADITH terminology, rigorously authenticated from the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) by meeting the exacting textual and transmission standards of the IMAMS of HADITH.

salat. The Islamic prayer.

salik. Someone in a Sufi TARIQA with a sincere desire and unremitting effort to change to be closer to Allah.

shari'a. Lit. the way to the watering place; the prescriptions of God for man's successful existence in this world and the next.

sheikh. Lit. elder; a fully qualified expert with IJAZA in one or more Islamic sciences; in Sufism, an authorized spiritual master.

shirk. Idolatry; associating others with Allah as partners to be

worshipped. The "greater idolatry" (al-shirk al-akbar) is KUFR, and consists in assigning a co-sharer to Allah in (1) His person (dhat) such as by believing that someone or something is divine or should be worshipped; or (2) in any of His attributes (sifat) such as by believing that someone or something besides Him is all-seeing, all-knowing, or all-powerful. The "lesser idolatry" (al-shirk al-asghar) is not KUFR, but mere ignorance and blindness, and consists in assigning a co-sharer to Allah in His rulings or actions, as when one thinks that people or things benefit or harm one by their own selves or properties without reference to God. Sufism is emancipation from *shirk* by TAWHID.

silsila. The chain of initiation of SHEIKHS connecting the Sufi back to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace). Through one's harmony with the initiatic chain of forebears, the full fruits of the TARIQA appear in one.

suhba. Companionship; in Sufism, the company and friendship of others for the sake of Allah.

Suhba. The yearly convocation of the MURIDS in various countries at the visit of their SHEIKH for instruction and help.

suluk. Lit. travel; transformation of the soul by effort in the path to conform to the Divine.

sunna. The noble way of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in character, graciousness, words, deeds, DHIKR, and HAL with Allah.

sura. A chapter of the Koran.

tafsir. Koranic exegesis; making plain the meaning, incomparability, exactitude, power, eloquence, wisdom, and content of the Book of Allah.

tahajjud. Night vigil prayer; arising from sleep at night to perform some supererogatory RAK'AS of prayer before dawn.

tajwid. To recite the Koran as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) did, by mastering the proper rules of recitation

that have been passed in unbroken succession from his day to ours.

taqwa. Godfearingness; awe and dread for Allah's might and power, and fear of overstepping His limits.

tarbiya. Taking someone as they are and raising them to the desired level of perfection; the training of a SALIK given by a MURSHID.

tariqa. Lit. way to Allah; it denotes both the path of Sufism in general, and also a Sufi brotherhood associated with a particular lineage of SHEIKHS and often named after its founder.

tariqa ilahiyya. The Sufi path considered from the aspect of Allah's own 'INAYA and choice of the way for Himself.

tawba. Repentance; atonement; return to Allah from every shortcoming; in earliest Sufi literature taking the path itself.

tawfiq. Allah's creating in a servant that which He is pleased by.

tawhid: Affirmation of the absolute Oneness, aloneness, and uniqueness of Allah in His entity, attributes, rulings, and actions.

ulema. Plural of ALIM.

Umma. Nation or polity. The "Umma of the Prophet" (Allah bless him and give him peace) has two separate senses: the *Umma al-Da'wa* or 'summoned community' are those he was commanded to invite to Islam, meaning everyone alive, as used in a number of HADITHS; while the *Umma al-Ijaba* or 'responding community' are those who actually answer this invitation and become Muslim, the sense in which it is usually intended today.

umra. The lesser pilgrimage or ritual visit to Mecca.

Wahdat al-Wujud. Lit. Oneness of Being; the Being of God, and that He has no co-sharer in entity, attribute, ruling, or action; the subject matter of Sufism.

Wahhabi. Someone who, influenced by the sect of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab of the Najd in Saudi Arabia, believes that Muslims who ask the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in this life to intercede for them with Allah (tawassul) are KAFIRS.

wali. Lit. one who is near; someone upon whom Allah has bestowed WILAYA; someone who is constant in the remembrance of Allah.

waswasa. Lit. whispered insinuations of the Devil; obsessive doubts and misgivings; over-fearfulness about religious matters. One stops it by learning to say no to one's NAFS, and realizing that practicing "more" than the SUNNA is less.

wilaya. Sanctity with Allah, sainthood, felicity in the Divine. Closeness to God attained by wholeheartedly following the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) in godfearingness and faith. The pronunciation *wilaya* has been used throughout the present work rather than the more common *walaya*, as the former is lexically valid for this meaning (*Lisan al-'Arab* [55], 15.407), and Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman preferred it.

wird. Daily litany of DHIKR or other regular spiritual works practiced by the worshipper to draw nearer to Allah.

witr. The odd-numbered RAK'AS that finish a day's prayers.

wudu. Ritual ablution of the face, arms, head, and feet in preparation for works of worship and being in the Divine Presence.

yaqin. Total certitude in eternal verities; for Abul Hasan al-Shadhili, a spiritual vantage-point even greater than MA'RIFA.

zakat. The percentage owed to the poor and other deserving recipients from one's wealth after the elapsing of a lunar year.

zawiya. Lit. corner; a meeting place for Sufi gatherings.

zuhd. Unattachment to other than Allah.

Glosses and Italics in the Present Work

The italicizing of the special Arabic vocabulary used in the present work has been designed to help readers master useful Sufi and Islamic terms easily. The author set Arabic words in roman type where possible, so that italics would retain their ordinary force of emphasis for English words when needed. To meet both aims, the Arabic terms are divided into four categories, treated in different ways:

The first category is of words found in some English dictionaries, such as *adhan*, *dhikr*, *fatwa*, *hadith*, *hajj*, *halal*, *haram*, *mufti*, *murid*, *sunna*, and *sura*. These are glossed in parentheses or italicized at their initial appearance in each of the first two Parts of the book. They are set in roman throughout the rest of the text. Only those not familiar to most readers are in the glossary.

The second category is of Arabic terms that admit of capitalization, which is sufficient to denote their foreignness, so they do not require parentheses. These are set in roman type, and given a single parenthetical gloss at their first mention in each of the first two Parts; words such as *Al al-Bayt*, *Ahl al-Sunna*, *Fatiha*, *Ihsan*, *Iman*, *Islam*, *Sahaba;* and events like the *Day of 'Arafa*, *Latifiyya*, and *Subha*. Again, only the less familiar of them have been added to the glossary.

The third category consists of "didactic words" which users of the present work as a Sufi manual should learn and know: basic Islamic terms such as *adab*, *akhlaq*, *'aqida*, *awliya*, *baraka*, *bid'a*, *du'a*, and *faqih*. These are italicized and glossed at each of their first two mentions in Part 1, then set in roman for the rest of it. They are then re-italicized and re-glossed at their first mention in Part 2, and only at their second mention in Part 2 if not previously introduced to readers in Part 1. Such words are thereafter set in roman throughout the text, unless italicized for emphasis in a particular context or for clarity. All words of this category appear in the glossary.

The fourth category is of Arabic words that relate to Sufism, but are less frequently used than the preceding category of common Islamic words. This category of less familiar words

includes such terms as *'arif, dhakir, fitra, ikhlas, 'ilm, tahajjud,* and *wilaya.* These are italicized throughout the present work wherever they appear, unless parenthesized alone as a clarificatory word, in which case they are set in roman, since their parentheses suffice to distinguish them from English.

Arabic terms of this last category are glossed at the first and the second instance they are mentioned in each Part, to acquaint readers with them, unless they are found close together, in which case their first gloss is enough. The glossary does not include words of this category that appear only once or twice in the text such as the word *maghrib* or sunset prayer, which appears only once in Part 1 and once in Part 2, and is defined each time, so needs no further explanation in the glossary. Part 3 has been treated as a continuation of Part 2 in this whole system.

This method of italicization, however arduous to implement, has proved to be the easiest way to acquaint readers with key terms without overuse of italics.

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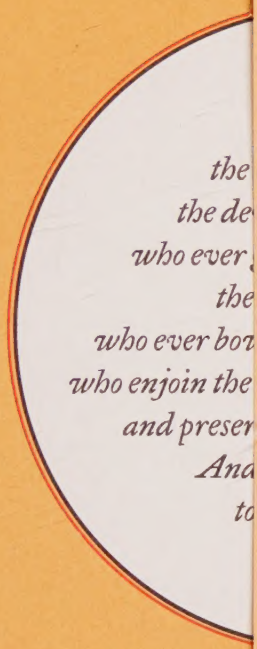

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